THE Hudson REVIEW

BEN MADDOW:
You, Johann Sebastian Bach—a story

NGUYEN NGOC BICH:
War Poems from the Vietnamese

HAYDEN CARRUTH:
A Meaning of Robert Lowell

JAMES MC CONKEY:
In Praise of Chekhov

MARVIN MUDRICK:
Sarraute, Duras and Others

Poems by WILLIAM STAFFORD, WENDELL BERRY, CHARLES TOMLINSON.

Articles and Reviews by CHARLES W. MILLARD, MARIUS BEWLEY, B. H. HAGGIN, CALVIN BEDIENT, ROGER SALE, ANTHONY BURGESS, ERLING ENG, WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD, LAURENCE LIEBERMAN.

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CONTENTS

War Poems from the Vietnamese	NGUYEN NGOC BICH	361
Poems of the Earth and Air	WILLIAM STAFFORD	369
Translations from Lucio Piccolo	CHARLES TOMLINSON	378
The Return *(poem)*	WENDELL BERRY	385
You, Johann Sebastian Bach *(story)*	BEN MADDOW	389
In Praise of Chekhov	JAMES MC CONKEY	417
A Meaning of Robert Lowell	HAYDEN CARRUTH	429
Modernist Architectural Space	CHARLES W. MILLARD	448
Letter from England	ANTHONY BURGESS	454
Music and Ballet Chronicle	B. H. HAGGIN	459
Beyond Psychiatry?	ERLING ENG	469

Reviews

Sarraute, Duras, Burroughs, Barthelme, and a Postscript	MARVIN MUDRICK	473
Mr. Appolinax	WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD	487
Flaubert: Why, Why *Him?*	ROGER SALE	493
Poetry Chronicle	MARIUS BEWLEY	500
The Worldly Mystic	LAURENCE LIEBERMAN	513
The Opacity of Fiction	CALVIN BEDIENT	521

Notes on Contributors 356

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Notes on Contributors

NGUYEN NGOC BICH* was born in Hanoi in 1937. His translations and those done in collaboration with Robin Morgan, Burton Raffel, and W. S. Merwin will be included in *An Anthology of Vietnamese Poetry*, edited by Mr. Bich and prepared under the auspices of the Asian Literature Program of the Asia Society.

WILLIAM STAFFORD's most recent collection of poems, *The Rescued Year*, was published in 1966 by Harper & Row.

CHARLES TOMLINSON is the first holder of the O'Connor Chair in English Literature at Colgate University this fall. He is currently at work on a translation of Ungaretti's poems.

WENDELL BERRY* was born in Kentucky, and he lives there now, with his wife and two children, on a farm in Port Royal. Mr. Berry's novel, *A Place on Earth* (Harcourt, Brace & World) will appear this fall.

BEN MADDOW lives in Los Angeles, where he is a screenwriter. He has a play optioned for New York this winter and a long novel in the works.

JAMES MC CONKEY* is a member of the faculty of the English department at Cornell University. "In Praise of Chekhov" is an excerpt from *Crossroads: An Autobiographical Novel*, which will be published by Dutton in January.

A staff psychologist at the V. A. Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky, ERLING ENG* is involved in research on an LSD-25 treatment project with alcoholics. His translation of Erwin Straus's *Phenomenological Psychology* was published by Basic Books last year.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN edited the forthcoming *The Achievement of James Dickey* for Scott, Foresman's Modern Poets Series. His first volume of poems, *The Unblinding*, will be published by Macmillan next spring.

ANTHONY BURGESS' latest book, *The Novel Now*, is scheduled for publication by Norton this winter.

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NGUYEN NGOC BICH

War Poems from the Vietnamese

PITY FOR PRISONERS

Ly Dao Tai (1254-1334)

They write letters with their blood, to send news home.
A lone wild goose flaps through the clouds.
How many families are weeping under this same moon?
The same thought wandering how far apart.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich and Burton Raffel

IRONIC APOLOGY

Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491-1585)

This annoying war. And I, comfortable in my horror of it,
content, safe, solitary, terribly concerned, of course.
My duty pledges me to my former lord
and I must keep my word, remain apart, aloof—
all an immortal can hope for. I should not have to face the world,
only sing a little, meditate, blend my soul with the universe.
This inconsiderable war. I must dwell on the word "contentment,"
a poet, an immortal, after all.
Anyone can be involved, of course.
How many people can choose fame?

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich and Robin Morgan

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ON WAR

Phung Khac Khoan (16th century)

War, no end to it, people scattered in all directions.
How can a man keep his mind off it?
The winds dark, the rains violent year after year,
laying waste the land, over and over.
After all, a man can make up his own mind
whether to act or not. They cut each other's throats
for the world. I can't take much interest in it.
Who is it that moves the clouds and permits the sun to shine?
He speaks, he smiles, he goes on bringing peace to the world.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich and W. S. Merwin

ROAD SABOTAGE

To Huu (b. 1920)

The cold moves from Thai-nguyen down to Yen-the
and the wind rages through the woods and the Khe Pass.
But I am a woman from Bac-Giang who does not feel the cold,
who feels nothing but the land, the land.
At home we have yet to dry the paddy
and stock the corn and chop the manioc;
at home we have quite a few children;
still, I follow my husband to sabotage the road.
Lullaby, my child, sleep well, and wait.
When the moon fades, I will return.

Over the hills
the moon squats, watching.
The road is too long, the holes too shallow.
Deeper, they must be deeper pits.
Spades, shovels, hands, men, women.

The rocks fall, the earth breaks.
Deeper, they must be deeper.
The soil smells rich in the darkness,

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the women compete with the men in teams:
men, women, spades, shovels, hands.

You have grown skilled at this, but so have I.
The road is too long, the night too short.
The path curves, winds, twists,
yet we gash our trenches into its flesh:
pits for the French when they come this way,
beds for the French to lie in,
graves in the land for the enemy of the land.
Faster, we must go faster. Deeper, they must be deeper.
The wind forms ice on my eyes and blurs the moon.
No child's cry breaks the silence, only the hushed rhythm
of spades, shovels, hands, sabotaging the road.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich and Robin Morgan

THAT PAINTER IN THE CITY

Tu Ke Tuong (contemp.)

1

in the morning you just wake up when that painter suddenly
splashes a swarm of green leaves
every one of us we see the sun suspended in air
but not that painter
he insists on thinking it a ripe fruit
and so he paints on the citreous background
a strange perfume

2

when he turns mad and jumps on the sandbag to perform
the children crowd round and cheer
the painter draws a ripe grenade hanging from a branch
and he loudly proclaims to the multitude
everlasting peace
he also points out to everyone
a sunbaked corpse loitering on the fence
then he adds to it just a touch of remaining fresh blood

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3

and when the blind bird is with child
he sketches on our eyes a pair of wooden crutches
and says here is enduring happiness
to illumine your blackened days

4

then the day we lie down
that painter again strokes a fresh green meadow
he says that's a cool and comfortable bed
and every morning
he adds innumerable fragrant blossoms
as we start to forget to breathe little by little.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich and Robin Morgan

THE STATUE OF THE CENTURY

Tru Vu (contemp.)

I hammer the pain of separateness
into a statue to stand in the park.
Below it I carve a horizontal inscription
that reads: Soul of the Twentieth Century.

My statue spills no tears
for it has none left to spend.
My statue tells no stories
for what's the use of telling stories.

My statue: the soul of the century
with no halos above its head.
My statue: the soul of the century
with no phoenixes beneath its feet.

My statue in fact is bare, naked,
no banner in its hand.
My statue casts its shadow aimless, everywhere,
with stone eyes fixed on nothing.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich and Robin Morgan

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FIRST TRAGEDY

Trieu Vu (contemp.)

1

The yellow telegram
with its stark typewritten letters
announces a death
She knew it would be his death
still she mumbles the words
telling herself telling
herself don't
cry
for this is common
in war who is ever free of tragedy

2

Just lie still lie still
you are free now my darling

3

Constantly thinking of the future
with a withering faith
she has painted her own portrait
the high collar the still-object round eyes
the bombs the grenades
everything is black
because nothing is left
who has not suffered in a war

4

In confusion she looks down
at the seed coming to life in her
coming to the misery of life
try to grow up like your father my darling.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich

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THE UNIVERSE

Pham Nha Uyen (contemp.)

1. *The Realm of Man*

you have morning, noon, evening, night,
you eat in the morning, at noon, in the evening, at night,
there are the reports going back and forth, happy ones, unhappy ones,
there are the people going back and forth, happy ones, unhappy ones.
there are tears and laughter, the thumping of bombs,
the whistling of bullets
so eat all you like
send reports all you like
fight all you like
escape all you like
then close your eyes.

2. *The Realm of Rocks*

at first a heavy head
nodding
at first two heavy hands
drooping
at first two heavy legs
kneeling
at first a heavy trunk
buckling
at last a heavy heart
dropping
at last a great load of rocks
silently rolling down
at last a great many statues
dumbly waiting
at last only
a great
silence

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3. *The Realm of Woods*

build me dense, really dense woods
build me dark, pitch dark roads
build me poisonous, really lethal streams
build me deserts, absolute deserts
that's my last request
before I rest.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich

HOME

Te Hanh (contemp.)

Seven years we've been away,
and my son just turned four.
They ask him: Are you from Hanoi?
He snaps back: No, I'm from the South!

He's never seen the South, but his young heart
still loves, desires, expects to return.
How can the enemy succeed in slitting off
the arteries where, for a thousand years,
blood has flowed freely?

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich

THE RIVER BACK HOME

Te Hanh (contemp.)

At home we had a blue river,
limpid waters reflecting bamboo.
My mind was a summer afternoon
as sunlight glittered over the surface.
I wonder if waters keep track of time,
if memories remain in your flowing streams,
o river that has bathed my whole life!
For you my love is still fresh,

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for you, river of my land, river of youth,
river of our beloved South!

Birds chattered in the bamboo hedge,
fish leaped through the air
as we, in bands of seven or five,
young birds, swam in the stream.
I spread my arms to embrace the water,
The river opened and gathered me in.
We grew up, each went his own way:
some were fishing all the day,
others plowing in sun and rain.
I took up a gun to fight far from home,
but still my mind like a squall, a storm
rushed back to the river it loved,
the image of a girl with ruddy cheeks.

Now the North has made me its son,
but in my heart I still hear the whisper,
the two sacred words—"South Vietnam."
Who can console me for the loss
of that yellow sun, that emerald sky?
I even miss people I never knew . . .
Sometimes, under trees in the afternoon,
I'll be suddenly overwhelmed
by the image of a cool, fresh river
that flows on, bathing me in its spray.
Native land! my mind is also a river:
love between North and South runs in one stream,
a stream no rapids or falls can stop.
I will go back to the land of my dream,
I will go back to the river of my land,
I will go back to the river of love.

Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich

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WILLIAM STAFFORD

Poems of the Earth and Air

FOR A COLLEAGUE WHO TOOK HIS LIFE

1

News of his death peeled off the yellow car
parked by his house, frothed among sounds
by the bridge. In the bus I felt the snake
across my feet, and watched the conductor,
calm, as required by the state. I read the news
and felt the fox gnaw all day inside my coat.

Forsaken liberal, he had stamped the curb:
every cause he ever found had had his vote.
How could his feelings breathe, without
injustice to accept injustice?

That night under the rain his neighborhood
fell to its knees; bushes began to care;
the river welcomed everything, its
tributary arms hidden by reeds or doves,
their sound.

But his last day composed and ended in
siren music, a loop of sound that captured
wolves, afraid, inside the police car's howl.
He fell into space.

2

I knew that man. Often we met. Great storms
and great still days went by. Always
that look remained, a plunge, a vision
launched through the window of the sky,
or turned, a window that went inward. At the last
the sun could not reassure, and then he let

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it crash in slow motion in that
silent world he reclaimed inside his head.

I remember he urged: "Think like
a bird." He said they sang as if God
was only a bird. He said people should
help each other, because they die, and besides,
"They don't have any wings." He wrote in his journal:

The bad luck of canaries—
they will sing in a cage.

Enemies, today I looked into the mirror:
you are winning.

Too bad about tomorrow—it may
never become yesterday.

Fields to a river say "Wheat, wheat."
When I was young I counted on that.

3

In his town, growing up, his people
ignored him. Too little to tax, too mild
to detest, he photographed with still eyes
any street, and he brought forward
wherever he went that suffering face.
Later, colleagues outshouted him; bearlike
shambling roarers took the stage.
And he thought people slighted him—imagine,
to be hated, thought that great!
Then he tried exile, precious as a jewel in fog.

It gleamed, those week ends. He had escaped
his work, their scorn. Greater exile occurred
to him, slammed back so quick a thought
it spreadeagled on the little sky inside
his head: "This coast could have my bones."

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And lest he founder in that swell, he
snapped up that space the gulls released.

4

I hold water in my hands and from it
read the sky. Below that window my hands
curl, so deep their intentions are like snow.
I bring him back, bring the incident, bring
his eyes, pity for that victim. I bring
the sound of friends, and proclaim
always a place, room for him, for anyone,
for all now here. For him and us I hold
that still sight long; I stare to find
something above us not just air or light.

FAREWELL, SUMMER 1966

To Dorothy

One of the leaves from
our sycamore caught on a
stone and in the rain folded
down like a hand.
A wave, and a wave, and a wave—
what can I stop in the deluge?

The loose door on the south
tapped slowly, along about midnight.
Behind my eyes I let the muskox
form their winter circle and stamp
familiarly under the first few faint
flakes posed above them.
A wave, and a wave, and a wave—

The Secretary of Defense vacationed
in the Oregon mountains. Though lame
he tried day after day to hike
into remote, quiet areas.
A wave, and a wave—

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Hearing our old music when I dropped a bottle
cap that fell down turning slowly through
the clear gold water toward what looked
like cities of coral and had that broken
whispered sediment the years bring
still places,
I plunged my gaze after it like a stone into
its death, a little flower of mud that
spread in slow motion and then cleared,
relapsed, and waited as if again
undisturbed forever.
A wave, and a wave, and a wave—

Trackers from the University found
sandals three thousand years old
in the cave at Fort Rock,
tied together like a pair of tennis shoes.
Some sinewy hand in the cave rested
them there, caught by the mountains,
now pinned by the light—some brave
explorer, lying heart to the ground.
A wave, and a wave, and a wave—

By dawn we heard through its thin boards
our boat nuzzle into the reeds,
and level day swept that prairie lake
far into elsewhere and smallness, its
multiplied moonlight wandering inward
and inward. Now all I can do is say it:
That mud was diamonds.

And send you this.

TEXAS—

Wide, no limit, the whole
state an airport, a continent
marbles could roll across; and
they say when the fist of the sun

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hammers it, the natives love it,
feel they would die if moved. They
have struggled to stay, and have
won, a catastrophe. Now they deserve it—
a cruel thing to say. But true.

But wide. I came on the Sweetwater
once. It was evening, and the doves
insisted they could redeem all the
universe. Never after that could I
deny a link with Texas. A farmer
strikes oil, and stuffs his mattress
with money, like excelsior. At a
space lab they look around and think,
"Might as well try for the moon."

And they get there. Long ago
the rest of the country joined their state
and thus became, really, a part of Mexico—
why contend? Joining is better, and is done
many ways, even if politicians have limits.
I say join the state, and Mexico, and the
politicians. Beyond irony is the hard country
no one can misjudge, where we survive
our indulgences and mean just the earth again—

Texas

THINGS THAT HAPPEN

Sometimes before great events a person will try,
disguised, at his best, not to be a clown:
he feels, "A great event is coming, bow down."
And I, always looking for something anyway,
always bow down.

Once, later than dawn but early,
before the lines of the calendar fell,
one of those events turned an unseen corner

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and came near, near, sounding before it
something the opposite from a leper's bell.

We were back of three mountains called
"Sisters" along the Green Lakes trail
and had crossed a ridge when that
one little puff of air touched us,
hardly felt at all.

That was the greatest event that day;
it righted all wrong.
I remember it, the way the dust moved there
Something had come out of the ground
and moved calmly along.

No one was ahead of us, no one
in all that moon-like land.
Oh, I thought, how hard the world has tried
with its wind, its miles, its blundering
stumbling days, again and again, to find my hand

THE LAST DAY

To Geronimo rocks were the truth,
water less, air not at all;
but the opposite he had to learn:
his hollow hand, his nothing breath—
they filled the world when all his loss
was a place to hide. Those cliffs
where he lived, those miles of stone—
relief came when they drifted across
his lightest thought; and he bought
his life in those dead hills
by the way they leaned as he touched
their sides and loved the air.

Then he could fall.

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SCOTT'S NOVELS

Lest the heart refuse our time, sometimes
a tapestry blows here, a century we
might have tried: men, hawk, hounds,
deer. All that the years have taken
ripples near.

And wrapped in that velvet dust, or searched
by the wind that gowned their time to them, all
our lost ones come, alive by the weave.
No matter how far they've gone, how
long, we grieve.

But these are the rules: come forth, come on,
let the tapestry close, be warned. Never
a child, or stag, or woman can last long;
the heart must beat now past velvet, pain,
pictures, wind.

AT THE GRAVE OF MY BROTHER

The mirror cared less and less at the last, but
the tone of his voice roamed, had more to find,
back to the year he was born; and the world
that saw him a while again went blind.

Drawn backward along the street, he disappeared
by the cedars that faded a long time ago
near the grave where Mother's hair was a screen
but she was crying. I see a sparrow

Chubby like him, full of promise, barely
holding a branch and ready to fly.
In his house today his children begin
to recede from this year and go their own way.

Brother: Goodby.

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WALKING WITH THE BLIND GIRL

We enter a hall in the music building
where gradually I realize a muffled
piano, strange little mouse noises
of strings, a contralto taking off for
Heaven. To be sure of her way, she leans
nearer to me than another girl would—
why not? we all guide each other—, her
soft arm brushing my sleeve; and in her dark
I feel the hall go away into the wild, its
eye opening for us, and in the whole building
a million faint flutters behind its doors, like wings.

ON EARTH

In Wyoming, high, often cold or
hot, you can walk the curve of the world
always varied with a slope for you,
where by crouching or even lying flat
in one of its hollows you have shade
or a huddle in the sun, out of the wind,
as coyotes or badgers do, taking their
riches full length, bathed in the immediate,
walled around by that constant whisper
the world makes passing its eons,
occasionally fluting a little streaming
note—a rock, or you, noticed by the wind.

IN A COUNTRY CEMETERY

Their last blanket, the wind, has
torn the whole winter down, now fumbles
frozen trees, and heads on south alone.

Oh stream that touched their life,
tense as a fence wire, wild:
God lived where you are from.

And He waits when you have gone.

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FATHER'S VOICE

"No need to get home early;
the car can see in the dark."
He wanted me to be rich
the only way we could,
easy with what we had.

And always that was his gift,
given for me ever since,
easy gift, a wind
that keeps on blowing for flowers
or birds wherever I look.

World, I am your slow guest,
one of the common things
that move in the sun and have
close, reliable friends
in the earth, in the air, in the rock.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Translations from Lucio Piccolo

In The Leopard *Giuseppe di Lampedusa describes the garden of the Salina household. Paul Neyron roses grow there: "first stimulated and then enfeebled by the strong if languid pull of Sicilian earth, burnt by apocalyptic Julys, they had changed into objects like flesh-coloured cabbages . . ." The "strong if languid pull of the Sicilian earth," the sudden violences of weather reappear in the spiritual and political climate of the novel. One meets them again in the poetry of Lampedusa's cousin, Lucio Piccolo (born 1903). His witch figure in* Veneris Venefica Agrestis *governs apocalyptic Julys and primordial torrents, but is capable of sudden freshnesses. The night, as personified in the poem of that name, appears to be related to her, but its ambiguities are of a more psychological kind than that unpredictability which betokens also her animal energy. The Palermo, whose heat and nocturnal songs are evoked in* La Notte, *is a city of religious houses full of both miraculous legends and stories of infernal apparitions. Thus the "heart of fire" with which the poem concludes suggests from one point of view an altar lit by night, from another a mysterious force leading we cannot say where. For there is something ambiguous at the very roots of life in this island where mysticism and sensuality grow so closely intertwined from childhood onwards: "Signore," asks the voice in* Oratorio di Valverde, *"dove è spirito? dove è senso?"*

It takes a strong poetry to penetrate successfully this world of "ancestral longings," scirocco *and stifling nights. Eugenio Montale, introducing Piccolo's* Gioco a nascondere—Canti barocchi *(Mondadori, 1960) situates the poetry's technical strength in its "lean, intense and wiry diction," and he clarifies further the spiritual geography of the poems when he attributes to Piccolo "that theme of Husserl . . . the contradiction between a universe which changes and yet is tangible and real, and a self which is absolute and unreal because devoid of tangibility." Piccolo defines his own literary context in describing himself as "a disciple of Yeats, Baudelaire, Mallarmé." He has written also of that sense of the vanity of*

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all things which pervades the work of Góngora—and Palermo, we must remind ourselves, is—or was?—the most Spanish of Sicilian towns. The almost rhapsodic note in many of Piccolo's poems may sound strange to ears accustomed to post-objectivist starknesses, but there are many kinds of melody and these are canti barocchi—*baroque songs, not rococo.*

VENERIS VENEFICA AGRESTIS

She springs from the ground-clinging thicket, her face
—gay now, now surly—bound in a black
kerchief, a shrivelled chestnut it seems: no fine fleece
the hair that falls loose, but a lock
of curling goat-hair; when she goes by
(is she standing or bending?) her gnarled and dark
foot is a root that suddenly juts from the earth and walks.
Be watchful she does not offer you her cup of bark,
its water root-flavoured that tastes of the viscid leaf,
either mulberry or sorb-apple, woodland fruit that flatters
with lies
the lips but the tongue ties.
She governs it seems
the force of rounding moons
that swells out the rinds of trees
and alternates the invincible ferments,
flow of the sap and of the seas . . .
Pronubial, she, like the birds that bring
seeds from afar: arcane
the breeds that come of her grafting.
And the mud walls of the unstable
cottage where the nettle grows
with gigantic stalk, are her realms of shadows:
she fires the kindlings in the furnaces of fable.
And round the door, from neighbouring orchard ground
the fumes that rise
are the fine, unwinding muslins of her sibyline vespers.
She appears in the guise
of the centipede among the darknesses

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by water-wheels that turn
no more in the maidenhair fern.
She is the mask that beckons
and disappears, when the light
of the halfspent wicks
makes voracious the shadows in the room where
they are milling by night, working at the presses,
and odours of crushed olives are in the air,
kindled vapours of grapejuice; and lanterns come
swayed to the steps of hobnailed boots.
The gestures of those who labour
in the fields, are accomplices
in the plots she weaves:
the stoop of those who gather up dry leaves
and acorns . . . and the shoeless tread and measured bearing
under burdened head, when you cannot see
the brow or the olives of the eyes
but only the lively mouth . . . the dress
swathes tight the flanks, the breasts and has comeliness—
passing the bough she leaves behind
an odour of parching . . .
or the gesture that raises the crock
renewed at the basin of the spring.
She bends, drawing a circle:
her sign sends forth
the primordial torrent out of the fearful earth;
(and the foot that presses the irrigated furrow
and the hand that lifts
the spade—power of a different desire summons them now)
she draws strength
from the breaths of the enclosures,
the diffused cries, the damp and burning
straw of the litters, the blackened
branches of the vine, and the shadow that gives back
the smell of harnesses of rope and sack,
soaked baskets, where who stands
on the threshold can descry
the stilled millstone, hoes long used to the grip of rural hands:
the rustic shade ferments with ancestral longings.

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Rockroses, thistles, pulicaria, calaminths—scents
that seem fresh and aromatic, are
(should your wariness pall) the lures
of a spiral that winds-in all,
(night bites into silver
free of all alloy of sidereal ray) she will
besmirch with dust even the curve of the gentle hill.
Now, she's in day, one hand against an oak,
the other hangs loose—filthy and coaxing,
her dress black as a flue-brush . . .
and the sudden rush of wind
over the headland, sets at large, lets flow
in a flood a divine
tangle of leaves and flourishing bough.
The heat, too, promises, discloses
freshness, vigour of the breath that lets free
peach and the bitter-sweet
odour of the flowering almond tree; under coarse leaf
are fleshy and violent mouths, wild offshoots,
between the ferns' long fans
obscure hints of mushroom growths,
uncertain glances of water glint through the clovers,
and a sense of bare
original clay is there
near where the poplar wakes unslakeable thirst
with its rustling mirages of streams
and makes itself a mirror of each breeze,
where, in the hill's shade,
steep sloping,
the valley grows
narrow and closes
in the mouth of a spring
among delicate mosses.
If, for a moment,
cloud comes to rest
over the hill-crest or the valley threshold,
in the living shade
the shaft of that plough now shows
which shakes which unflowers unleafs
the bush and the forest rose.

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THE NIGHT

Sometimes the night turns gentle;
if it can raise from the obscure ring
of mountains a breath of freshness
to bring suffocation to an end, from the walls nearby
it releases a cluster of songs, it rises
with the creepers through the long arches, on the high
terraces, on the great pergolas,
in the openwork of the unstill branches, it reveals
carnations of gold, it gathers
faint secrets from the threads of water on the gravel beds
or moves tired steps
where the dark waves smash against breakwaters of white.

Suddenly on the screen of dreams
it blows into living veins faces already ash, words
that are voiceless . . . sets spinning the girandole of shadows:
on the threshold, above, all around
a vain emptiness, a vast passageway sways into forms,
a moving glance seizes
and a glance that stops cancels them.

Reverberations of echoes, shatterings, insatiate memories,
re-flux of lived-out life that gushes over
from the urn of Time, the hostile waterclock
that breaks into pieces; it is a mouth of air
that furiously feels for a kiss,
a hand of wind that wishes for a caress.

On the stone flights, on the step of slate,
at the door that is splitting with dryness,
the quiet oil is the sole light;
little by little, the rigour of the sung verses
spent, the dark is more dense—it seems like rest
but it is fever; the shadow hangs from the secret
beating of an immense
Heart
of
fire.

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LANDSCAPE: FROM ANNA PERENNA

Above the roof
ascends, impends all at once
the mountain—to the left, encumbered
with a thorny green on green, with coulters
of a shed leafage, agèd tree-rinds, brush:
and caper, euphorbia hang at the winds'
mercy; where the coastline bends
and summons the shadow in, spreading it across
the scape of wrinklings, at the slope's
summit, folds fall open: valleys
of thicker green, there you can seek
and find puffball, buttercup and wild leek:
on dense leaf, on creeping bronchia
scum, wood spit, dark dew
of the swollen stalk, the thorn, the goitered
and oozing stem, that which remains
clammy with rainbow-coloured stains, which never sees
sunlight (and assiduously the invisible shuttles
weave, mutate, but the cycle will stay
the same forever) fed with an ancient moisture,
a mildew of vegetation . . .
and perhaps an eyeless lizard slides away . . .

UNDER A BOURBON KING

What days those were! and little seemed enough
for story and fable flourished, and the lip
was prompt, the ear attentive amid the suspense
of faces. The word was a sprig of corn in the wind
dense with grains that the air
scattered to the perplexed city, to somnolent village,
to far-off cottages.
The skein-winder of the hours
reeled-round times of quiet expectation,
cool returns to the vast divans of patterned flowers.
Saint Elmo's fire spelled safety
in the seastorm and the serene Bear
came back to shine
tiptoeing on the sea

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before the beacon-lights, before the dark
irresolution of the further coastline.

*

Terror along the shore: the fury of rape
drags off amid shrieks a skirt for a flag
and the corsair, with his black-porcelain eyes,
his serpentine beard:
scimitar strident against peasant arms, rage
replies from the hillside fort, from slit and parapet
the mortar bragging its force in bursts of fire,
thundering away like a fair-day drum from its stage.
Then, it's as if the sound
of the tumult brings-out a more vast dead calm:
the irrigation water spreads
evening into the plots of garden ground.

WHERE SPORES OF SUN

Where spores of sun
break the flying spume
sea spaces quiver,
spread room for venture;
courier cloud is
linking the promontories,
and the cliff's in flight
light with echoes.
But where, already,
the shadow stays
in the high vigil
of stems and leaves,
there (suspended)
a wisdom of springs
spellbinds the air.
And in the heights (grasses
undermining the stone)
already a well-like gloom
conjures colours, forms:
they will go down
into sleep: you are leaning
above the unknown.

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WENDELL BERRY

The Return

for Harry Caudill

1.

To re-enter
the place of beginning, the place
whose possibilities I am one of,

to return
and resume such a continuance
as there could be no other place,

to come back
to what could not be escaped—
that is to say there never was a departure.

That is to re-enter
the dust of my first flesh, and to turn
painfully against what is my own.

That is to despise wholly
what it would be half pleasing
to become.

2.

Kentucky, I know the greed and pride
that wear your fields to stone, owners who make
their graves richer than their land.

The worst that you have come to
is my worst. And I know a troubling
threatened loveliness that is in you.

And there are lives of a few men I knew,
and know still, that have taught me
that here also the best has been, and may be.

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3.

I dream an inescapable dream
in which I take away from the country
the bridges and roads, the fences, the strung wires,
ourselves, all we have built and dug and hollowed out,
our flocks and herds, our droves of machines.

I restore then the wide-branching trees.
I see growing over the land and shading it
the great trunks and crowns of the first forest.
I am aware of the rattling of their branches,
the lichened channels of their bark, the saps
of the ground flowing upward to their darkness.
Like the afterimage of a light that only by not
looking can be seen, I glimpse the country as it was.
All its beings belong wholly to it. They flourish
in dying as in being born. It is the life of its deaths.

I must end, always, by replacing
our beginning there, ourselves and our blades,
the flowing in of history, putting back what I took away,
trying always with the same pain of foreknowledge
to build all that we have built, but destroy nothing.

My hands weakening, I feel on all sides blindness
growing in the land on its peering bulbous stalks.
I see that my mind is not good enough.
I see that I am eager to own the earth and to own men.
I find in my mouth a bitter taste of money,
a gaping syllable I can neither swallow nor spit out.
I see all that we have ruined in order to have, all
that was owned for a lifetime to be destroyed forever.

Where are the sleeps that escape such dreams?

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4.

Who has come in the night,
tying his yacht here at the shore,
playing his radio for fear
of deep water and the dark
and the silence of his thoughts,
strewing over the rocks his imperishable
aluminum and plastic garbage?
—more rubbish in one night
than all the Shawnees made.

Who has come and gone,
leaving scattered here the litter
that was all he meant?

My neighbor and brother,
a violent brainless man
whom I must intelligently love
though I do not, or become
him, as he is.

5.

To put on again and wear
the earth of the death
of what could have been
and is not to be,
to be drawn back
by a shadowed beauty
that is vision's source
and imperative
is to know
what one is damned to
—an anguish of the mind
turning against itself
within itself, knowledge
turning against hope
in sleeplessness, bodies
in hateful marriage.

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6.

There is in my mind a place
I cannot go to, immune
from this place, a place I
have neither left nor come to,
a forest place where a stream
stands bright and still
in flowing, the light on it
going neither up nor down.

7.

In the place that is my own place, whose earth
I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing,
a great sycamore that is a wondrous healer of itself.
Fences have been tied to it, nails driven into it,
hacks and whittles cut in it, the lightning has burned it.
There is no year it has flourished in
that has not harmed it. There is a hollow in it
that is its death, though its living brims whitely
at the lip of the darkness and flows outward.
Over all its scars has come the seamless white
of the bark. It bears the gnarls of its history
healed over. It has risen to a strange perfection
in the warp and bending of its long growth.
It has gathered all accidents into its purpose.
It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate.
It is a fact, sublime, mystical and unassailable.
In all the country there is no other like it.
I love it as I have seldom loved anything.
I recognize in it a principle, an indwelling
the same as itself, and greater, that I would be ruled by.
I see that it stands in its place, and feeds upon it,
and is fed upon, and is native, and maker.

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BEN MADDOW

You, Johann Sebastian Bach

THE DRAPES HAD GONE TO THE CLEANERS the Tuesday she had come back from Italy; furious, cold, and already ill.

When she awoke, she saw, as if it were not hers but a lover's, a fine plump foot, with a cinquefoil of gleaming creamy nails thrust out below the stitched deep blue silken rolls of her familiar quilt. And with the same fine detachment, the joyful clarity that one feels only on that first long day of convalescence, Irene let herself be overwhelmed by sheets and waves of rising sunlight which splashed westward toward her through the curtainless windows, and reached and wrapped the great black Bluthner concert grand, open as she had left it weeks ago. She half arose, bulky and naked, bending herself at buttock and knee, hoping to make breakfast and review the inferior world again.

The cablegram was still open, where she had left it three weeks before, on the heavy, horizontal strings of the piano. Irene knew it by heart: "MAMA DARLING COULD YOU POSSIBLY POSTPONE TOUR I THINK I AM DYING."

But as she twisted, still in bed, reluctant, scratching the coils of her belly as she turned, that mad cat of hers leaped out of hiding and dug her unpadded claws into Irene's left thigh. Perversely then, avoiding with practiced skill the clutch of those monstrous pianistic hands, she sprang away and under the great bed, whence her blue eyes, fiercely and ridiculously crossed, like a Japanese demon, stared toward the blank, blinding window; and a pink mouth yowled for sympathy.

Irene got up and switched on the recorder; the tape slid left to right, silent as a lizard. Irene walked back and forth in the apartment, at first aimlessly. Her own familiar playing rang out, tumbling upwards in the arpeggios of the opening movement. Then, as she felt better, she began to make fresh coffee; while it was brewing, she still paced round and round, heavy, naked, and nimble, from kitchenette to bathroom to the black knob of the tone control, and then stooped down to the door where a fan of yesterday's late mail lay still unopened. There was the

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expected letter from Padua, and though her heart immediately banged between her two breasts, she put it aside, unable to read it so soon. Instead, she phoned Sysmanski at home; he was her agent at the Hurok office, but he would scarcely be sensible for another two hours.

"Did I wake you, Arthur darling?"

"Hell, no. It'd take a lot more than that."

"This is Irene Packer."

"Funny, I thought it was somebody important."

"Baby," she said, "Do you have a pencil?"

"No. Why? You want to borrow a pencil at this time in the morning?"

"I want you to wire the coast I'll do their concert, after all."

"But Irene, please, no, I wouldn't, take my advice."

"I would."

"You were deathly sick only two days ago."

"I'm well enough to eat breakfast, so I'm well enough to do the program."

"You want to get out of New York."

"I want to get out of New York."

"Have you heard anything from the girl?"

"I got a letter from Elinor only this morning."

"And—?"

"And—I haven't read it yet."

"You're made of iron, aren't you?"

"I have to be."

Sysmanski said, "Irene, if I were the right sex—,"

"You mean, if I were—"

"I'd marry you in a little minute. In the meantime, come and have lunch with me tomorrow."

"No, Arthur. I'll be practicing like mad. Thanks."

She smiled, and hung up. Then she had her coffee and found two pecan rolls, stiff and stale but all the more sugary, and gave herself a chocolate mint as a present, and then switched off the tape. She stretched her arms and did some setting-up exercises, at a slow pace; and then sat down on the leather bench, still nude, before the great black piano. She listened to its heavy silence.

"Oh, you monster, you're waiting for me, aren't you?" she said to the instrument. That cat, forgotten, jealous at the sound of

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her voice, made an irritable sound under the shelf of the bed. Irene turned to glare back; she massaged her cold wrists, and then thought, acutely, painfully, of her daughter Elinor, and pushed the image far to one side in her mind. That cat was called Rusty, though it was not her color. She had muscles made of barbed wire. She responded only to violent noises, or to a newspaper hurled and opening like a dangerous bird. Her reply, bristling and hissing, may have been all pretense, but for some minutes, at least, the beast was tame.

Irene's next concert was two days off. She was aware of a double danger. When she had not practiced, even for a day, she could feel a tiny stiffness in the joints of her fingers, the signs of her future arthritis. On the other hand, there was the danger of practicing too much, so that the performance itself was easy, smooth, perfect—and without that strange, almost painful energy that derived from some uncertainty, that doubt as to the ultimate meaning of what she was playing, that effort which her friend Artur Rubinstein called, "one extra drop of blood." She let her hands strike down at the cool, flesh-like ivory, and then began to unwind the opening arpeggios. Bach had published this last Partita when he was past forty-five; there were no dynamics, one could play the piece boldly (she did), or softly, amoroso—however one chose; yet his strong and melancholy wisdom never changed. She played the whole composition, right through to the intense and syncopated Gigue; and only then, her mind going backward in perception, did she lean forward and take the rustling cablegram off the open and still faintly vibrating strings.

The cablegram had arrived at about four in the afternoon. On that evening she'd had a concert with the Boston Symphony. She had therefore to put the whole thing resolutely out of her mind. She took several aspirins, went to the Lincoln Center, played, even by her own standards, with magnificent force, and then took the earliest possible plane (it was a Sunday morning) straight on to Rome. She had spent that awful night drinking cups of chocolate, to which she was vaguely addicted, especially when depressed or anxious. All that thick, sweet liquid seeped through her stomach and irritated her nerves. She slept uneasily on the plane, waking only once. They were flying through a turbulence of towering clouds, as gigantic above as below; she

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began to imagine that her pulse beat more and more feebly; she was convinced, quite calmly, that she was about to die. But the panic slowly passed. She phoned from the airport in Rome. The connection to Padua was alive, that early evening, with an irritable, cosmic crackling of some sort; she could scarcely hear her daughter, who was in the University Hospital, but apparently not in bed.

"An accident, mama darling!" said Elinor; she had to shout, but that very fact reassured her mother.

"Now tell me, baby! Exactly what kind of accident? Have you been driving on these awful Italian roads? You haven't bought a car or a scooter, have you?"

"Oh, you hate Italy worse than you hate me, don't you Mama!"

"Now, Elinor," she said, quite calmly, "I happen to love Italy. I'm not sure about you, that's true. Now what kind of an accident, and how are you hurt? Your silly skull is all right, I hope?"

"Perfect, Mama. But please don't cross-examine me."

"How do you feel?" asked her mother.

"I don't know. They've given me sleepy pills. . . ."

("Why does she say *sleepy*, why not *sleeping*? That girl is so corny!" her mother cried out inside herself. It was a criticism far more profound than it seemed.)

"—Aren't you coming to see me? If you can't just say so. And I'll try to adjust. Oh, Mama, are you really calling from Rome?"

"Of course I'm in Rome!" They discussed the time she was coming, and set it for noon tomorrow, for Irene was exhausted. "I'll fly, of course, though I hate planes, as you damn well know."

Irene took a taxi into Rome; she felt marvelously light, somehow; excitement was good for her; the ruins of Roman tombs, overgrown with purple wisteria, gleamed as the sky grew slowly dark, with a dull, historical glow. When she arrived, she pulled off her stifling clothes and immediately went to bed.

Once, she remembered, when Elinor was barely fourteen, and Irene had begun to despair of her musical education, Elinor persuaded her to switch from piano to organ. After several months of remarkable progress, Irene got permission for Elinor to practice very early in the morning at St. Catherine's Cathedral. She could imagine Elinor sitting high up in the church, on the

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organist's bench, in the cold of an early morning in March, and rubbing her hands to keep them warm, and with her feet, monstrously long, and wearing high sneakers with a black rubber patch at the ankle bone. What must have happened, was that high up on the organist's bench, Elinor could look down obliquely through the enormous, frigid space of the church; and sometimes, not always, see small groups of nuns come in through the distant door, and kneel, genuflect, and look up toward the altar, above which hung a commonplace and not even particularly lurid crucifixion; they were mostly young and ugly, with standard metal-rimmed glasses, but sometimes on the faces of one or two was such purity of feeling, such exaltation, such tender stretching toward ecstasy, that Elinor, young as she was, one early morning became a fanatic convert. At night, and secretly, she read the pamphlets of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith; and in her room, with the latch hooked into its rusty loop, did penance for masturbation, and other mortal sins, by sleeping all night long on the naked floor; and once or twice, in cases of stubborn pleasure, she would lie down on rude stones which she had stolen from the Botanical Park nearby. When Irene, the outraged daughter of an anarchist family, found these Catholic stones and pamphlets under the folded blouses in the third drawer from the bottom, she went into such a rage that she seized Elinor and beat and slapped her with the coarse, utilitarian paper of which all religious literature seemed to be made.

It was the middle of June, and school had just ended. She arranged for Elinor to go to a strictly atheist camp in the Pocono Mountains; but Elinor and Elinor's newest friend, a thin blonde girl whom Elinor called Toothpick, with a silly smile and long thin feet and little buds of breasts, pooled their pocket money and jumped the train just as it began to move. Burning with excitement, they got a bus to as far north as possible, and when most of their money was gone, hitchhiked all the rest of the way to Montreal; their goal was the Shrine of St. Ursula the Compassionate, where you could earn remission of sins by climbing one hundred forty-one concrete steps, especially if you did them on your knees. The two girls spent their last cash on a taxi from the outskirts of Montreal; they arrived just behind a chartered bus of pilgrims from Bloomington, Indiana. The taxi driver, a

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French Canadian whom Elinor described as an incarnation of Santa Claus, warned the girls that a female could not enter the Shrine without a hat. All the ladies going up the steps had fancy hats of one kind or another; straw and flowers were the fashion that year. The taxi driver loaned Toothpick his taxi driver's cap, absurdly too big for her, for the sweat band came down until it was stopped by the ridge of her protruding ears; and he knotted his handkerchief in four corners for Elinor to wear over her hair. Thus capped, the two teenagers began to kneel up the steps, counting as they went. They had gone about twenty steps, when, looking at each other, they began to giggle, and each giggle fed the other until they were both bent double with violent attacks of laughter. Thus the martyrdom of St. Elinor ended.

Irene, her great, restless body tranquilized with the memory of silly laughter, fell asleep at last. She was in her favorite Roman hotel, a rather formal and ornate building whose name, Il Massimo d'Azeglio, matched its prandial designs: the great cakes and cheeses on the dessert table, the glazed fowl and the pinkly phosphorescent beef, and the enormous scalloped pies of truffle and minced veal. The bathtubs in the hotel were invariably huge; the soap was specially wrapped and smelled of some bitter masculine perfume. It was only a few streets from the "New" railway station, a post-war shell of thick glass and airy steel. A moment after she fell asleep, she had several nightmares in succession; they were all familiar, a replay from her prolonged and uneasy pregnancy. She was giving birth to a child. Was it Elinor? Impossible; the baby was covered with sharp scales like a fish.

Accustomed to the exercise of her will, even in sleep, she tried to force these stupidly symbolic dreams to end. She assured herself (there were several selves in the dream) that Elinor was perfectly all right; anyway, she was no longer a baby, even a painful one. After that, she had a second dream of an elaborate glass funeral coach in which there was a wedding cake as large as a mountain; she knew quite well that the mountain was herself.

She awoke, thinking she heard a locomotive close by. But it was only some distant nocturnal thunder. Rain began to splash the tall windows of the room; she got up and went to the one on the north side, and unfolded the shutters; they were waxy to the touch. She wouldn't sleep any more, or so she decided. She sat in

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an easy chair, naked as usual; would she have time to practice tomorrow morning, before flying to Padua?

Insensibly the rain stopped, but the lightning continued: ultramarine flashes accompanied by a metallic scraping and crackling; no, they were only sparks from the short-circuits of the electric trolleys that turned the corner at five-minute intervals. Irene swung open one shutter and cranked the left upper pane into the weather above the street. She thought, absurdly but sadly, that she heard Elinor's voice speaking Italian. Was she still dreaming?

She leaned out; rain fell on her thick, dyed, black hair, wound in a single braid that now fell forward over the arch of her powerful neck; pure drops blown out of the sky brushed at both her nipples. Down below, a woman was screaming curses at a couple of policemen on the opposite corner. Thin, she was bulked out by a black raincoat; and this, and her cropped gold hair, gleamed as if enameled. Diagonally across the street, in one of Rome's beautiful doorways, another woman, older, square, and disconsolate, held a handkerchief to her cheek and looked at it, occasionally weeping and exclaiming at what apparently were stains of blood. This got nothing but scorn from the blonde.

"*Ehi! Ragazza—!*" called Irene. The gold head looked up; and shouted, as if to the galleries of a theatre, her dramatic complaint that here, here entirely, here by the grace of St. Jude of Lost Causes, here was her corner, she had worked this corner since the beginning of the year, but now this diseased, ignorant and Neopolitan whore. . . .

And suddenly she ceased her complaint, and asked, would Irene want her to come up? She would make it a nice adventure, and because it was late, it would be ridiculously cheap. "What room?" she inquired. Irene stared down at the woman's face; she was pretty, with eyes markedly oval, and a beaked mediterranean nose. Irene drew back and shut the window and laughed and went back to bed. Oh, things were going to be fine, and the world, which consisted of those who went to her concerts and those who did not, was quite unchanged by Elinor's cablegram.

Next morning, she cancelled the piano she had ordered, and flew very early into Padua, and took a room in the large commercial hotel on the main corner. At about nine o'clock, as she was having mixed coffee and chocolate, with the consolation of

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globs of ricotta spooned onto flat, fresh bread, a small but splendid brass band began to march around the corner. In her quilted robe, still munching and drinking, she looked down to read the banner that followed. They were the names of various groups and groupings and grouplets; one sign said, DOVE LA PACE DI DEO?—but that was about as blood-thirsty as they got. Irene's mother had been a Polish anarchist; in the old yellow snapshots, taken for subversive picnics, she wore a workman's cap with a visor, and parted her straight hair in the center of a wide pure forehead; her eyes burned like feverish stars. In those days, the oligarchic world was about to crumble, and May First was always a great harsh holiday, and legless veterans were wheeled forward in slow ranks, singing *Bandiera Rosa,* in translations that were equally hideous in every country in the world.

Irene dressed and went down into the streets. She found herself tremendously excited. "Strike, strike, strike!" she chanted to herself, as she had once done as a child on her father's sickly, bony shoulders. A float representing *Labor in Chains* was just going by. It was towed by an enormous brand-new truck, property of the *Fraterni Gatti Furniture Factory,* and there were samples of the furniture in the truck, too, with prices prominently displayed; evidently Padua had a tame bourgeoisie. A sour dark man in a frayed suit was passing out leaflets. Irene pursued him and got one; he seemed rather reluctant. WARNING! it said, in great red letters. She got a taxi (the price was doubled because of the holiday) and bent her head to imbibe the fiery message. The taxi driver smoked an abominable local brand of cigar, jutting it up toward his nose, and inhaling it thus, from both ends. She asked for his help in the translation, but the leaflet was disappointing: it advertised a cure, not for capitalism, but for venereal disorders.

Aha! Was this the trouble with Elinor? It would account only too nicely for her gaiety, her evasions, for the ambiguous word "accident," and was only too consistent with her daughter's character. It was rash, restless, and obsessive, and in that respect, exactly like her own; but, in her absolute lack of any talent whatever, she was like Rabinowitz. Because Elinor was the child of rape; not by her father, but by her mother.

Well, naturally: all the men she'd known were cowards; they

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were as frightened of sex as a rabbit seduced by a fox. Rabinowitz was the worst; but before that there was Jay Louis Vicker, a handsome and ridiculous man, a writer who slept all day and revised his one published and unperformed play all night long and every night, smoking cigars and drinking *ouzo,* for which he had developed a passion when Irene took him on tour with her to Greece; and there were other men, even feebler and funnier. At her friend Sylvia's she'd been to a birthday dinner; all the guests were professional women, most of them with good income, heavy eaters like herself, with decisive and quarrelsome voices. Irene was past forty, and Sylvia's birthday disturbed her; she began to get drunk on the authentic raspberry brandy she herself had brought as a dinner present.

She found herself standing in a corner, making a passionate defense of one of Bach's sons, Carl Emanuel, though no one present knew enough music to attack him. The women, all a bit tight by now, and slouched or squatting on Sylvia's marvelous new light Danish furniture, simply roared at everything she said. Suddenly, horribly, she had two concurrent feelings: she wanted to get out, and she wanted a child. She rushed down a flight of linoleum stairs and onto Second Avenue near 68th Street, where she roamed silently back and forth before the dark antique shops, till at the corner she collided at last with a small man, close-shaven, and wearing what she later described as "a black, flat, immaculate hat." He had difficulty, at first, understanding her question. Would he like to come and sleep with her? She asked him the same thing in several languages. "Ach, no!" he said. He explained that he had no money to spare; he was a refugee from Vienna, via Vichy France.

Irene kept him in her apartment almost three weeks; as soon as he would show signs of restlessness or irritation, she would serve food that she regarded as especially aphrodisiac, such as rich cheeses, tins of pate, smoked shrimp, and champagne; and then, opening her thick velvet robe, without bothering to take it off, she would press herself heavily upon him. She weighed thirty pounds less, in those days, and she was solid, voluptuous, and skillful. He told her all about himself, but she rarely listened. One day, when she was practicing a particularly loud passage in the first Brahms Sonata, he took advantage of all that *martellato* to

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dress, shave, and escape. However, he abandoned his ridiculous felt hat, which had a famous Portuguese label, and which she kept for years, in case he returned. Poor Rabinowitz, she had a curious affection for the man; for the body is stubborn and sentimental; and Elinor was the product of their dark collaboration.

"I may go on and study medicine," Elinor was saying to her mother. They had come on to the open sundeck on the second floor of the University Hospital, in a fine, open part of Padua. A young man with a spinal injury, suffered at soccer, hung upright in a padded frame, grinning lewdly at Elinor. Her daughter was beautiful; thinner than she need be, of course; her broad, wide, doubly curving mouth was accentuated by the darkness under her cheekbones and beyond the outer folds of her enormous pale green eyes. A tiny shadow, faint and luxurious, arched under each twisted nostril. Elinor had both forearms suspended in a black silk sling.

"How's my friend Rusty?" Elinor said.

"She's fallen in love with a fish."

"What, Mama? You're joking. Did somebody give Rusty a fish?"

Irene said yes. She didn't say from whom she had received the gift; actually, it was from Sylvia, who was Head of Publicity at Saks-Fifth. "It's beautiful," she continued. "It's black, with black fins. Not fins—underwater wings, really."

"How lovely!" said Elinor. It was impossible to tell, from the very day that she learned to talk, whether she was being sarcastic or not.

Elinor had been baptized under her mother's maiden name; she was a prodigy, but only up to the age of five; she could read music and played a quarter-size violin; but then slowly, stubbornly, she resisted all further education. At six, she ran away from home, and was found next day, quite unharmed, in the apartment of a moronic but polite New York City apprentice fireman who moonlighted as a plumber, and who had come to their place with a box of tools, on the inside cover of which he had scotch-taped the photo of a girl wearing only a fishnet, cork floats and all, which both Elinor and her mother, in possibly different ways, had found so astounding. At nine, Elinor failed arithmetic and became passionate about horses; she kept a saddle over the arm of a chair in her room, and wore riding boots to

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private school. Four years later, in fact, she won three blue ribbons at the Horse Show in Madison Square Garden. A year later, she turned Catholic. At sixteen, she was an alcoholic, and Irene, secretly proud of this disaster, took her along on an international tour that lasted well over a year; but her daughter wept for hours out of boredom. She convinced her, at last, that she hated music, and she took to spending hours in her mother's room, particularly during concerts, trying, on the inner skin of each forearm—the memory gave Irene an instant feeling of dread—various perfumes from her mother's collection of tiny crystal decanters. At times, Irene was convinced that her daughter was simply illiterate; but then, after some horrible, screeching quarrel between them had cleared the air of all emotion whatsoever, Elinor would go to bed and write pages and pages of a kind of crude, raw, and original poetry, in which she mingled slang, musical terms, and obscenities in several languages, which she had learned from hotel employees all over the world.

And once—was it in Brussels?—Elinor had swallowed all of Irene's cough medicine. Some day she must ask her if it was an accident—or revenge. It was curious that she had forgotten all about this horrible episode, as if it were a paragraph on the inside page of a Flemish newspaper; as indeed it nearly was. Elinor was then almost eleven, and Irene had just refused to buy her a horse they had seen galloping past in the public park. Elinor could not be wakened for almost seventy-two hours. Did the accident imply another act of this sort? But Irene pointed out to herself, with some scorn, that one doesn't commit suicide by spraining both wrists.

Elinor had continued gaily chattering, while Irene, safe in the awful past, chose not to listen; but her particularly childish tone, imitation Joe-jah, Atlanta actually, where they had spent all of one Sunday together, penetrated Irene's defense at last, and slowly enraged her. "Mama," Elinor repeated, "would you please, pretty please, get me a po'table American TV?"

"No! Of course not!" Irene told her. They shifted their chairs on the hospital sundeck; it was getting very warm again.

"Well, then, ah won't tay you," said Elinor.

"Tell me what?"

"Haow it happened."

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"Well, how did it happen?"

"No, I'm going to let my Mama purely die of curiosity."

"I'll bet it was one of those scooters, wasn't it? A Vespa, or a Yamaha, or one of those horrible items."

"No, ah reckon ah just won't tell you, Mama, evah, evah."

"I suppose that's because you took my Christmas money and bought one, and you're afraid to admit it."

"It wasn't on a scootah," sing-song sang Elinor.

"I suppose you would have enjoyed the whole thing immensely if I had been present, screaming my head off, while you skidded out of control and tore your arms open on a clump of trees somewhere?"

"Oh, you're right! Right, right, right. Except there wah no clump of trees, Mama."

"Well, whatever. I'm told you may recover. I sincerely hope not."

"Oh, Mama mia, you are truly so funny!"

Irene rose and looked for her raincoat. That they loved each other, they denied; but it was true and it was often frightening. Once, in her lonely rage (Irene had dressed elaborately and gone to dinner with an oboe player, mad, naturally, as all oboe players must be), Elinor had smashed Irene's whole collection of perfumes and hurled their travelling case after them, down into the crowded street outside the Rasoumovsky Hotel. Two men were hurt by broken glass, and Elinor's jealous rage cost Irene several thousand guilders. Yet it wasn't this particular act that broke them apart, but Elinor's renewed and tearful insistence on creeping into Irene's bed. She knew that Irene had always slept alone; it was a form of secret self-protection. The presence of another person in her bed made her feel at once restless and exhausted; this was true even during her marriage to Rabinowitz, especially with his pale, icy, nervous feet. And the touch of her daughter, coming to her full of grief and kisses, in the rainy morning of a Dutch November, curving herself against Irene like a spoonful restoring itself to the inside of a spoon, made Irene sick with a sensual terror.

Next day, she had phoned Hurok himself, and made him pull strings to get Elinor into the University of Padua, in spite of her curious and uneven education; they took her on as a probationary

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student. So mother and daughter parted, as they had innumerable times, on sullen terms with one another. Six months passed and Irene heard little, and was hurt by her silence; but she put the slow accumulated pain far back in her mind, as something she must face and kill eventually; and then the cablegram came, and all the old sutures were torn violently open.

Elinor said, in her normal husky voice again, "Will you give a concert while you're here?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Suppose I asked you?"

"Look here," Irene said. Her voice was darkening and trembling. "I want to know why you're being so kind?"

"Oh, just to make you mad, ah raykon."

"Elinor, when I look at you objectively, all I can see is a truly horrible person. Of course you're attractive, I don't mean that. But your soul, if you'll give me permission to use that word, is just perfectly sick."

"I know, Mama."

"And sometimes I think it's all my fault. And other times, I don't. People have to be responsible for themselves, certainly at your age."

"Well, but will you?" said Elinor again.

"Would you really like me to play? Do they have a decent hall?"

"Should be. It's got a wooden ceiling a thousand years old."

"Today is Monday. Maybe Wednesday, the night before I go."

Elinor said, "Goodness, we're in a hurry, aren't we."

Irene said, "Look, dearest. We'll spend all of Tuesday together. Maybe go to a play or something. I saw a notice in the hotel."

"Better yet, maybe I could go home with you?"

"We'll see. I have two concerts in L.A. I could meet you in New York in about a month."

"Play some Bach, will you, Mama, at the University?"

"You really want me to, darling? But I haven't practiced in two days. It makes a difference, you know. Not to others, but to me."

Elinor smiled. "You know you'd love to, Mama. The fact is, you love Johann Sebastian Bach far more than you love me, don't you?"

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"That's so true," said Irene.

"It's quite hopeless, Mama," Elinor continued. "He's married. Twice, in fact."

Irene felt the familiar awful softening of love toward her daughter. She said, "Isn't it time for your pills?"

"Will you give them to me?"

"Why, are your arms that badly hurt? Can't you bend at the elbow?"

"Yes," said Elinor. "But I just like you to do it." Irene bent down and kissed her several times, then called a nurse for a glass of water, and gave her daughter the medicine.

Yet Irene left the hospital with tremendous relief. Instead of taking a taxi she walked through Padua, past the open air markets and toward her hotel, where she'd gotten, through the hotel porter, a pair of seats for the theatre tomorrow night. It was Zeferelli's new production of *Romeo and Juliet,* to be staged in English at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, thirty miles away.

She went downstairs and ordered an enormous lunch in the dining room. As she ate, she felt an irritable apprehension at the very edges of her mind; did that accident really happen on the road? And wasn't there a man involved? The idea of a lover for Elinor—and one as selfish, young, and clumsy as he was bound to be—was so repulsive to Irene that she gave up the idea of resting after lunch. Instead, she took a benzedrine, and had the chief porter downstairs get her a rented car. She drove the Fiat down the river road, past the Palladian villas with their classic columns and their stucco walls the color of scorched clay. There were people everywhere walking in their holiday clothes, and a pair of lovers hugging behind a tree; they had a beautiful green glass bottle, floating, empty now, in a tub of melted ice. There were some odd traffic signs along the way; one of them announcing, with a great yellow numeral, how many people had been killed in traffic accidents at this precise curve of the road.

At one crossroad, about halfway to Venice, a hideously crushed car had been lifted and balanced on to a concrete pillar; it was the very epitome of popular art—morbid and moral at the same time. Yes, that's how it happened; Elinor, she was sure, had been riding pillion, with her arms clasped around the belt of some dark-lashed boy, and a truck, no doubt, came past in the

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opposite direction (one roared by her now, hooting its illegal electric horn), and Elinor must have been flung through the air when they skidded; hurled the fence and into one of these ancient vegetable fields.

Oh, it was perfectly clear now; Elinor was evasive, naturally, because of the boy; probably he was not even a student, but some baker's apprentice or even common laborer; for her daughter was at once intrigued by any sort of tool working in a man's hand. Irene parked the car in the multi-layered garage at Venice and got on a *vaporetto*. Many of the passengers carried tiny red flags.

The sun burned over the water, bursting into fragments as a wind arose from the Adriatic. The skipper of the *vaporetto* leaned out of the open window of the pilot house, cursing; a passenger next to Irene, with an unrolled black umbrella, was cursing him back; they were engaged in a dispute about the fact that the *vaporetto* had forgotten to stop at one of the islands. "Revolutionary Holiday!" cried the captain of the *vaporetto,* and made a hairy fist; he knew the complainant by sight, as a Bureau Chief of Traffic Planning and a clerico-crypto-fascist from baptism onward. The other passengers waved their arms and with a nice impartiality, encouraged them both. "Stop the boat! Stop! Stop!" shouted the man with the umbrella. The skipper pulled the visor of his cap down over his eyes and disappeared into the pilot-house. Ten seconds later, the boat came to a shuddering halt in the midst of open water.

The sea was ink black; like the bottle that Elinor had discovered in her mother's desk at the age of eighteen months, and while Irene napped, had opened and emptied every closet, and smeared clothes, music, and mementoes from every one from Mahatma Ghandi to Huey Long, with splotches of Jet Black Indelible. It was Ink Day. Irene wanted to kill her, and the feeling had never quite vanished.

Meanwhile, the skipper emerged from the window of the pilot-house and politely invited the passenger with the rolled umbrella to get the hell off the boat; Christ could walk on the waters, possibly a Bureau Chief could, as well. All three hundred passengers on the boat commented on this sacrilegious insult. The man with the umbrella put on a marvelous performance, full of groans,

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tears, and bitter imprecations. But the skipper smiled; he sat in the window of his pilot-house and fanned himself with his cap, as if he were utterly and serenely alone. The rich salt tide, on which Venice appears to float, nudged the boat first in one direction, then another, but only very slowly and capriciously. Irene felt marvelous again; she was free of any responsibility. Perhaps death was like this: a numb drifting, a *vaporetto* on the soiled waterways of a romantic and banal Italian eternity; surely it was not the vengeful and chiaroscuro cave invented by Dante.

As the shouts, the lapel-seizures, the self-administered slaps of the forehead, all grew more and more violent, Irene became more and more calm. She bitterly acknowledged to herself that she didn't want Elinor to see *Romeo and Juliet,* after all. Actually, it was a rather incredible play about an incredible teenage love, pandered to a farethewell by an incredible priest who made incredibly stupid blunders, and which ended with an incredible orgy of double suicide in a marble family vault already crowded to the rafters by recent corpses. No, *Romeo and Juliet* was definitely not the right entertainment for herself and Elinor. For the girl was quite wild and melancholy enough, without the sanction of Shakespeare. Literature, she thought, was by its nature corruptive; but never music. She began her favorite daydream: herself as Bach; in the last month of life, writing bar by bar, absolutely complete as it went along, two voices, three, six, canon and inverse canon, and all in the service of one's own proper voice, wiry, strong, somewhat sad, and yet, quite amoral; creating, with antiphony and counter-force, these galaxies, these cloudy harmonies, resolving one into another; as great as God, while one held the proud note-scribing pen. She wiped the point, in her imagination, on a piece of old linen, part, very possibly, of an old and worn altar-cloth. For Bach, she told herself, was a great hypocrite, serving only himself; he had worked so hard, not for the glory of God, but to satisfy the terrible metabolism of his own soul.

Was this piece for herself? Sadly, no. She was too entangled in human connections; a man could have a child—Bach had seventeen—yet never feel more than love. But a woman's child is the branch of one's self-made, tree-like self; not to be severed except with the teeth of the saw. Yet how much of herself was truly

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Elinor? Nothing, really; yet at the very moment she knew this to be quite true, she saw Elinor on the *vaporetto,* laughing near the upper rail, and with her head turned away. Now she turned toward Irene, and looked down; it was someone older, though with the same turn of the jaw and temple. She began to shout and push, along with the other passengers. By now, they had floated till they were only twenty yards from the cement shore. Lines were tossed aboard, and Irene herself, along with many others standing near the rail, stretched out her hands and seized the wet hemp ropes, pulling in the wrong direction. Thus, by contradictory garrulous human force, the boat was hauled into dock.

Irene was mad with the pleasure of this incident. She loved to be surprised, or even cheated, by the world; it served to make things real for a moment. Sweating and smiling, she disembarked, feeling the bodily pleasure of the crowd as if it were an enormous single person, and no longer a stranger. On the dock were two lovers, holding hands, waiting to get on. She greeted them in Italian, asking if they wanted two seats to *Romeo and Juliet* Tuesday night.

"Davvero?" they said, both at once; were they frightened of her? They began to talk to each other in English. So she had them all wrong: they were English tourists, very young and fair, and brother and sister.

"Wouldn't we have to ask Mum?" said the girl.

"I imagine, yes," said the boy.

Irene assured them the offer would cost them nothing, absolutely nothing. "I was going to take my daughter, but she's been in a traffic accident, nothing serious, but she should rest, you see." They agreed to meet later, at 4 p.m., in the piazza in front of the theatre, when their parents would both be there.

"Thank you so much, it's really very decent of you," said the girl.

"But we'll have to persuade Mum, you know," said the boy.

"Why," asked Irene, "is she such a monster?"

"Yes," said the girl.

And she laughed, touched the girl's sleeve, and strode off. She had her Belgian walking shoes on her feet; they cost an enormous sum, because she'd had them hand made in Bruges almost ten years ago; like a painting or a sculpture, they would

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last far beyond her own life; they were made of some sort of pliable tawny, soft iron. Irene felt extremely, ridiculously, unreasonably happy; as if not taking Elinor and herself to see a pair of adolescent lovers solved all their nagging problems. For what was the dilemma, exactly? Wasn't it that Elinor, in spite of the laws of nature, was not her daughter, but the pale and morbid progeny of poor Rabinowitz.

The crowds were dense, and when the sky became overcast and it rained, although fitfully, she would find herself penned into a covered alley, or into a rectangle under a cafe awning, or into a stifling doorway. Even when the rain stopped, it was impossible to hurry, for the holiday crowds were slow and even stubborn, and her idea of the right direction was continually confused by the irregular, branching, angulating streets of this part of Venice. How to kill the hours agreeably? All the cinemas were closed, but from the posters moldering on the walls she learned there was a Regatta today, in honor of May First. The Union of Venetian Gondoliers was to stage a race down the Grand Canal. She made her way toward the water and rented a seat in a gondola that was tied to one of the jetties. The young gondolier loaned her a moth-eaten parasol. The balconies up and down the Canal were hung with scarlet banners decrepit from a couple of centuries of aristocratic use; behind them, in the shadows, people sat with plates of food and glasses of wine. Almost two hours passed in the parked gondola. Irene dozed several times, her thick round body rising and falling blissfully to the rhythm of the brillant, black water. In a dream, she heard someone say, in a high-pitched voice—"Astonishing . . . The greatest woman pianist of the age . . . Formidable. . . ."

Slowly, reluctantly, she awoke. She complained of the heat, and the young gondolier gave her mixed wine and water to drink from the neck of the green bottle which he had brought for himself. Irene cleaned the rim, more or less symbolically, with her dark silk sleeve. As she drank, she thought she heard her name called out; she stood up, but it was only a girl crying, "Anna, Anna!" Hundreds of people took up the cry. It was their amusement till the race should begin. Just above Irene, in one of the windows of the palazzo behind her, there was a middle-aged film star, waving her love to the customers down below; visible

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behind her was a morose young man in pink, horizontally striped pajamas, thrusting his rather prominent chin out of the window and eating a sandwich. He became, for her, the image of Elinor's boyfriend, Roman, agreeable, useless, and dangerous. She saw him lift both hands and cry, "Bravo! Bravo!" The race had begun; in the middle distance, twenty-three gilded gondolas came rushing on, each poled forward by a single gondolier who prodded the water like Neptune with his spear.

Irene's own gondolier rose with his green bottle and began to scream, *"Papa! Papa! Papa!,"* which Irene took to mean that the Pope had arrived; but it appeared that the gondolier's father was one of the racers. He was a stocky man with a slow, powerful stroke and looked, as he came straining by, to be almost fifty. That's the sort of man she should have married, thought Irene; by him, she'd have a clutch of thick, dark, belligerent sons—though this particular son was little more than a pale and pleasantly lazy young man. He left the race to his father. "*Non sono vano*—I'm not vain," he told her.

Meanwhile, the race of the gondoliers passed the finish line and was over. His father got second place, which, said his son, meant a silver-plated medal worth a few hundred lire, at most. Irene got off the parked boat. It was almost four by now, and the first thing she did was lose the way toward her appointment at La Fenice. This was absurd: now she would have to keep the tickets and go to the theatre with Elinor; mother and daughter tied together forever by a bloody birth; for Elinor, characteristically, was a Caesarean child; both of them dressed uncomfortably in the early heat and seated, like two pretty bon bons, in that candy box of a theatre; pure sugary sentiment; quite unbearable. No, she had to find the English couple.

She had a glimpse of herself, stubbornly advancing, with her fine proud face thrust forward, in a shop window full of elaborate pastry. She went in to inquire the direction. Then, as long as she was there anyway, she bought a half-kilo of little cakes decorated with spangles of chocolate and halves of walnuts. She began to eat before she left the shop; as she came out, a bitten fragment of a cake fell out of her thick hand and was seized by some sort of black animal, with wings as dusty as a bat's, which darted out of a narrow doorway: it was an old woman in faded mourning clothes, tall, with a startling pink ball in each eye socket. At a

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distance, now, of ten feet, the two women stared at each other, the famous, aging concert pianist and the hungry, dotty grandmother, and each chewed voraciously at their bit of cake.

"*Buon appetito!*" Irene said to the woman, and grinned at her; but got no response. She left the rest of the oil-stained paper bag on the edge of a dry fountain in the little square, and looking back saw the old woman swoop forward and take it and hide it under her flaps and rags. So, with this hasty sacrifice, Irene felt she had pacified the Fates, those old, hungry, triple monomaniacs, with their clothes the color of ancient umbrellas. It was true, but she turned the corner of a church, and, suddenly, there was the theatre on the other side of the piazza, but it was a quarter of five; the young English couple had obviously come and gone. Only a group of twenty German tourists, thick-legged and handsome, were standing on the broad steps of La Fenice. A hoarse feminine guide was explaining to them the trade routes and sordid commercial origins of all that splended Venetian art. Beyond them were two men, one in shorts, and the other with large glasses, a pale moustache, and a kind of tweed kilt; a little to the left of this pair, and listening at the edge of the German group, were a couple of young tourists holding hands. The girl turned, and seeing Irene far off, smiled; Irene recognized her, rather slowly, as the English girl; now her brother raised his hand as if to wave, but touched and twisted his cropped hair instead. Irene, laughing, strode down the long flight of outside steps, and, as she came toward them, cried, "Oh, I am so sorry! I'm late, but then I'm always late! Well here you are, so it doesn't matter. Wait, now. Have you asked—" she said with unavoidable irony, "—your parents?"

The English girl led Irene toward the man in kilts. "This is the person who offered the tickets," she told him.

"We're very grateful," he said; his voice was not particularly high, but it was certainly not a man's either; and his kilt was really a skirt of some English or Irish tweed. But the other, the shorter man, nodded and smiled; he took out an empty pipe and put it back again; he was rather pleased, on the whole, but nervous. The young girl looked off into the sky; the boy, though, felt he should explain. "This is my Mum," he told Irene. He meant the one with the moustache, and now that Irene looked at her closely, it was not trimmed and neat like a man's, but luxuri-

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ant and somewhat unkempt, of that indeterminant British color between pale and gray. Irene gave this hairy Mum the tickets, excused herself, and went off. She immediately felt sick and yet excited.

"Fate has struck at me twice," she said, almost aloud; she always addressed herself in these corny and melodramatic phrases —"and fate will strike again."

Irene had returned to the *vaporetto* now; she was going back in the late heat of the day, utterly dulled and exhausted. The boat now stopped at every island; friends and relatives shouted from the windows above, to whom Irene was forever a fat old stranger. Suddenly, that cat, Rusty, sprang uninvited into her mind; who, in her periodic desperation, would whine and mutter and back up to Irene, wriggling and flaunting her inflamed and furry behind, until Irene, disgusted, would seize her by the skin back of the head, as if she were a kitten, and shut her up in the bathroom. Every season there were new scarifications on the enamel of the bathroom door, marks of feline obscenity.

Irene had named that cat in memory of a redheaded cousin, nicknamed Rusty, with whom she had sat in a car that had been abandoned in an empty lot full of immense, prickly weeds, to eat sticky candy and press noses fiercely together; both of them were about eight years old, athletic and filthy brats, forever at war with their great square bosomy female relatives. And then there was the second Rusty, a swimming counselor at a girl's camp—God! More than forty years ago!—the shimmering, slim, muscular, thick-handed, sun-golden idol of all the girls' cabins. Irene was not quite twenty, in charge of chorus and campfire musicales; at the time she was pink and shy, with great tangles of tar-colored hair. They all went walking in groups every night, on the path through young pines bordering the lake. When the moon sank, it grew absolutely dark. Irene and a group of older girls were walking on an invisible road, pressing their faces into all that yielding, gently swimming darkness. She heard Rusty, moving nearby, exclaim as she struck the edge of her right bare foot on a boulder that protruded from the road; and Rusty's expletive, that simple word spoken aloud for the first time in Irene's life, and not merely thought or seen or imagined, was not brutal, but simply mysterious. Someone took her hand, a moment later, and holding Irene still as the others in the group

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advanced, bent her backward as she was kissed; lifting her face till her eyes were full of the vast meander of the Milky Way, a soft and glowing sisterhood of stars.

Irene dressed all in white for her concert at Padua University. She had gained weight even in the brief period since the cablegram from her daughter; the silk that she loved was tight and twisted at her armpits. The Massimo d'Azeglio served vast meals, cooked with the delicate Roman cuisine that she so loved. She had seen Elinor about once every day. They had taken to cross-examining one another; once Irene asked Elinor, "Are you in love?"

"I've been in love every three weeks since I've been a baby," said Elinor. Then she added, "They're all such little kids around here, even when they're 21 or 22, or even 25. Why don't you introduce me to some nice old man? Somebody you've discarded, I don't care."

On the morning of the concert, Elinor no longer wore the sling for her arms, but had a large new bandage on each, from the forearm to the base of the fingers; it was already soiled, with traces of lipstick and some sort of anonymous gravy, and also various of her fellow students had signed their names; *Con Amore Eterna,* said one of the inscriptions, in blue ink.

Irene said, "Where were you going with this man when you were hurt?"

"When did I say I was going anywhere?"

"I don't know if you did or you didn't. It doesn't matter. Is he an Italian?"

"Italians!" said Elinor. "I hate Italians, they talk a great game. But they're like rabbits. Two minutes, then they scootch back on the pillow, heave a sigh of relief, and borrow a cigarette."

Irene laughed and told her about the English woman on the steps before La Fenice; her anecdotal style was in the family tradition, detailed and witty; but she censored all mention of the tickets she'd given away. Elinor only stared, and said, finally, "Did you ever consider growing a moustache, Mama?" So they parted, as usual, on bad terms.

Yet Elinor was there in the audience, in the very front row of uncomfortable wooden folding seats; she was restless, and glanced frequently and coquettishly to each side. She wore long sleeves and appeared rather pale. She didn't applaud as her mother

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came to the piano; no doubt her injuries would hurt if she banged her palms together. Irene adjusted the knob on the leather stool, rubbed her wet hands on her handkerchief, and began.

Her program was deliberately unconventional. She turned the history of music backward, and began the concert with Schoenberg's piano pieces, the earliest group, morose, languid, romantic, and yet full of acid qualifications; they were frequently marked with quadruple piano and quadruple forte; after these, and the polite applause—for most Italians hated everything from Wagner onward—she plunged into the supernatural passions of Op. 111, Beethoven's last sonata. There were only two movements; the first was a condensation, a summary, of the whole furious and seductive world; but the second movement, with its extended, hovering, wing-like trills, was a preview of Hell disguised as Paradise; *Sensana—Nirvana.* She hurled this monstrous masterpiece at her young audience with superb defiance. The first movement bristled with passion; the second had the perfection of icy and crystalline technique. At the end, the audience sat still; Irene rose and bowed, rather ironically; then, as she left the piano, indeed after almost half a minute, the students came out of their hypnotic trance and began to applaud rather timidly. Little by little, as she returned and bowed again, they began to shout and stamp their feet. Irene looked toward her daughter. Elinor sat quite still, her head somewhat to one side, clasping her tapered, long-phalanged fingers. For the first time, Irene noticed there was a boy with a face like an adolescent Cupid, sitting at her daughter's left. He leaned over and whispered to Elinor. Irene tried to read her daughter's lips; she was saying something like "No, no, man, no,"—it was certainly something negative, for the boy sat back, hurt and sulky. Elinor yawned; she became all tongue and teeth; she gaped like a fledgling.

Irene watched her as she took a seventh bow. She had heard much applause in her long concertizing life; unlike love, it was never tiring; maybe because it was a gift without responsibility. She sat down again for an encore, and said, in Italian, "My daughter, who's here at the University—." There were cries of *brava, bravissima,* and she looked again toward Elinor, noting, in the oblique light, the marvelous hollows at the base of her long neck, —"has especially requested that I play some—" she smiled mater-

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nally at the audience—"Johann Sebastian Bach." Now she let her hands sink down, with sudden instant pleasure, into the beginning of Partita VI, letting its curious seven-headed rhythm ring out, one after another, like amethysts on a chain. She played the fugue with marked sadness, and then brought back the septimate chords to enclose it. Irene moved on toward the final harmony, which shifted, at the last possible moment, from minor into major, with that one new bright G sharp; and then Irene lifted her hands into silence, but only for a couple of seconds. Her daughter Elinor, in the front row, was looking upward, her eyes tracing the ancient wooden squares on the ceiling. Irene let her fingers strike down toward the keyboard again, sloping her heavy wrists, feeling the thick elliptical muscles still tense in each palm, and began the opening delicacies of the Allemanda—and as she played this dance, she looked again toward her daughter.

Poor Elinor, her head to one side, was asleep.

The final Gigue, ending the Partita, Irene played as a fury of conflicting voices; never before this had she understood the violence of their measured, syncopated cacophony. She played this movement as if with one long-held, cramped, but prevailing and conquering breath. It helped her to endure the future which she still had to face, quite alone, in a foreign city, with a foreign girl, whom in every way except financially, formally, and physically, she must now begin to recognize as in no way her own child.

She was finished. She got up from the piano.

She saw Elinor wake, rather slowly, at the applause, and saw her smile, but still she didn't clap her hands. Irene went out into the lecture room which had been provided for her rest between numbers. It was horribly vacant. Already sobbing, she found a door on the other side, beyond the blackboards, and emerged into a small, closed, and little-used courtyard, in which grew several orange trees. Burst and rotten fruit had fallen unattended on to the pale brick walk: they were the characteristic sweet, small blood-oranges of the Mediterranean.

She was crying and shaking. She wanted desperately to shed her body like a crustacean. She had the repeated empty nausea of crisis; and felt some painful effort to conceive a third and happier life (her second had begun with the birth of Elinor), though of what sort, at sixty, she had no idea. Her heavy, somewhat hairy thighs were like two weights that drew and bent her down,

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and bent her great, white, plump back under the silk, down, down toward the brick-plated ground, pressing both knees against the spatter where red oranges had fallen and burst.

Elinor said, "Mama, what in hell is the matter with you?" Irene rose at once in the darkness, and sat down, still sick and crying, on a curved marble bench that had sunk into a patch of flowers, lopsided, and so low that now her two flanks were raised as if she were giving birth. Elinor, moving away, began to pluck and examine oranges from the nearest bough of one of the trees.

"You're always angry and I never know why," said Elinor; and bit a hole in one of the fruits, and began to suck through the skin, rather noisily. There was still applause from inside the hall, two walls and a room away.

"I'm so stupid!" said Irene.

"Oh, mother, don't upset yourself so much about me. It's not that important."

"You asked me to play Bach, why?" Irene said. She gasped and sobbed, alternately; like a child out of breath, having run a long way and fallen at the very steps of her house. "You deliberately asked me for Bach, and I did what you asked me, I played Bach. And you fell asleep." Then she added, "Why are you so sleepy? Are you taking drugs? Is that what happened? Is that the accident, you were so awful, you won't tell me about?"

"Oh, Mama, for heaven's sakes," said Elinor, "If I'm going to go ape, I'll let you know long in advance," and began to spit out seeds. Her mother began to control herself: it was a matter of breathing; she remembered this from the year and a half she had spent in learning Yoga.

Elinor was saying, "It's so silly. You're upset because Bach makes me sleepy. Well, he does! I'm never going to be like you. Why can't you get that through your great big famous head? You're rich, talented, intellectual. So it's not your fault, is it? That you have a stupid daughter. Or mine, either."

"I'm not rich. Where in hell did you get that idea?" So, with great fat tears running down into her mouth, Irene vented her grief in an easier form; she truly and deeply hated her daughter; there was no escape from that fact; her present mockery was a knife that divided them, like the one sentence of sarcasm that sums up and breaks a marriage.

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"You don't particularly like me, so what's the difference?" said Elinor. Irene laughed, that statement was so true and so small a part of the truth. Elinor went on, "Well, do you? I don't think you ever did. So why worry about it—want an orange?" With her left fist, in a curve, that went from her own belly to her daughter's hand, Irene struck the offering away. Elinor fell backward slightly, recovered, looked steadily at Irene, though with a curious, downward smile. She began to push up her long sleeves, straightening her arms as she did so, and lifting both, alternately toward her mother to see and judge—

—No, it was quite impossible! Children are secret maniacs, thought Irene. Elinor was saying, "—Quite a week! We had finals in practically everything, my Italian of course is great, why not, the best dictionary in the world is to be found in bed, you said so yourself. Well, anyway, I may possibly pass, but just. International Relations is not only boring, but terribly bloody. When you come to think of the people who die just to change some line on a map! And by the way, I changed my room. I don't know if I can get along with this new girl. Her name is Amy Poinceau, her father's a painter, do you know him? She's from Alsace-Lorraine, and is she ever a freckled mess—"

—Elinor was coming forward, still, an action that took only half a second, but was augmented, stretched, into an agony of boundless time, lifting her arms and turning her palms upward toward Irene—

"And that boy Filoso, really cute!" She said to her mother, "Believe me, you're not feeling any worse about the situation than yours truly, though right now I'm fully recovered, believe me. There's just a couple of interesting scars, just for the memory. No one will notice them, particularly these Italian boys, who tend to attack you in quite a softer part of your geography. Which reminds me, I am not seeing Signor Filoso any more, he's just too sickening. And anyway, and this is really big news, last night at last *ho le mie cose,* so therefore *tutto va bene.*"

—Elinor was thrusting her exposed wrists toward her mother's face; on each of them was an identical two inches of surgical tape.

Elinor was saying, and very flatly, too, "—anyway, Filoso, he would never condescend to marry me. I'm too silly. He said so. I wasn't under any particular illusion as to that. Or I hope not, anyway. So anyway, anyway,"—she mocked her mother's custom-

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ary postponement of sadness or disaster—"I stole the razor blade he uses for paper collages—" Irene began to faint; which was silly, because how could Elinor be capable of suicide when she was capable of nothing else? No, it was a trick, like her excursion into Catholicism, to astonish and appal one's parent.

Elinor continued, "—anyway, Mama, you're always preaching freedom. Well, don't you see that no freedom is possible or means anything, does it? Unless you have the freedom to kill yourself?" And when this had no affect on her mother's face, with thumb and forefinger she tore off the bandage, the one on her left wrist, and turned the palm upward so Irene could see the new drops of blood rising in a jagged line between the stitches.

"My God, ridiculous," cried Irene. She was lying on the floor in the adjacent classroom with the view of the underside of twenty old fashion desks, all slowly revolving. Some of them had the customary black splotches of gum, due to the influx of the last few years of American students. Irene got up at once, but the room continued to swim past; and also Padua, and Rome and the lounges of various airplanes, with steaming cups of soluble coffee, and loud voices in that universal and incomprehensible language spoken only by loud-speakers, and at last, the artificial silence of New York City; for her apartment was on the eighteenth floor, far above the filthy River.

She went to the window and touched it with her hands to judge the outside weather. The angel-fish had died long ago, and some time in the past week she had buried it in a pot of geraniums, as a sort of symbolic fertilizer. However, she had forgotten to empty the tank, and a small jungle of underwater greenery still thrived, slowly bubbling.

Rusty, back from her ill-tempered stay at the vets, was convinced the fish was still alive, but in hiding. She was sure that one day its huge protuberant eye would emerge from its vegetable refuge at the bottom of the tank. She therefore acquired a new habit; she would leap to the narrow sill, and keeping one cross-eyed glance alert for possible flying objects would dip her small sleek head and begin to lap up the empty water in the tank. Hopeless, of course; but Irene wondered whether it was a feline strategem —or a sort of twisted love. She got up and opened the letter from Padua; returning, still naked, to sit on the leather bench; she rarely used the glasses which had been prescribed for her

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five years ago, but now she was obliged to find them in order to read her daughter's writing: there were two sheets of paper, of different colors.

The first was a review torn out of *Il Progresso Padovano,* praising her concert as "worthy of the best tendencies of modern pianistic culture," etc., etc. At the end of the article was a short paragraph regretting her recent illness, and expressing hope for her quick recovery, in the interest of Italian-American relations. The other sheet was a page of ugly typewriter paper, smudged with, possibly, thick Italian coffee. It was another one of Elinor's detestable poems. She read it as fast as possible:

Blood oranges
Nobody eats a big breakfast around here
Nothing
Nipples and salt
I wish I could remember one little thing
Nothingness twice in succession
Oh, you're ever so sweet, aren't you
Edge of a used
Raw mineral
Rude sucking
Blue razor blade
Child.

Irene tore it up and let it fly out the window toward the River. The wind took it over the morning tide and toward that Island where they kept drunks, whores, arteriosclerotics, and suicides, all under sedation. She shut the window firmly, and then, by way of consolation, bent forward and kissed the envelope and pressed it against her cheek. For the girl was still her daughter: her one procreation, her baby, her wild, cold manic bird. She folded the letter, with the cablegram, and locked them both away in the case where she kept her smaller mementoes; the worn gold ring she had gotten from Rabinowitz, and one of one pair of garnet earrings which the original Rusty had once hurled in frustrated passion, into a small lake filled with moonlight and then with ambiguous darkness.

Oh, there was no doubt about one thing, anyway. The black fish was dead; yet Irene took to refilling the tank every day; and eventually Rusty would drink nowhere else.

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JAMES MC CONKEY

In Praise of Chekhov

LONG AGO—IN GERMANY, NEAR THE END OF THE WAR—two corpsmen came into the field and lifted me onto a litter. They were so careful and gentle that for their sake I gave a little groan, though I felt no pain. They strapped the litter to some metal bars above the back seat of their jeep. One of them sat beside me while the other drove. It was dark. Lying on my back, I could see nothing of the jeep. I floated slowly through the sweet air of a spring night, the head of the corpsman, with the cross outlined against the circle of white on the back of his helmet, bobbing and drifting along with me. On a hillside I saw a bonfire and heard some unfamiliar plaintive song.

"Drunk!" the corpsman said appreciatively.

"Who?" It was my voice.

"Happy! Drunk! They're supposed to stay put, them Russians from the slave camp, but whenever a freight goes east they rush at it. Some of them make it to the roofs. You should hear them laugh! We found a leg between the rails yesterday. The trains go slow through here—they never should have bivouacked them crazy homesick Russians near the tracks!"

The field hospital was a school or a church on top of a hill. Inside, the rough stone walls were whitewashed. I lay on a table looking at a pulsating overhead light; in the distance I could hear the rumble of a gasoline engine. One of the corpsmen unbuckled my boots and cut off my trousers and shirt and shorts with a pair of scissors. Snip, snip, snip: I thought it wrong to ruin clothes like that. For a moment I fell asleep. When I awoke, the corpsman was still beside me. "Would you like some water?" he asked.

"That would be nice," I said, though I wasn't thirsty. He put a moist piece of cotton in my mouth. It was like a gag, and I didn't want it; but I waited for him to be called elsewhere before hiding it under the sheet. The table was on wheels, and a Wac nurse pushed me into an adjoining room where a young doctor was waiting. I said to the doctor, "I can't move my legs."

"That's the least of our worries," he said. He looked tired, but was friendly and cheerful. The nurse was shaving my pubic hair.

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"How do you know what's wrong?" I asked. "You haven't even *looked*."

He smiled. "I make it a general rule to look before I operate, whenever I can."

"But I just got here."

"That's what you think."

"Just a moment ago I was driving a jeep that flipped," I said. "I was the booby who hit the trap."

"That's what lots of my patients tell me."

The nurse had finished with the razor. I looked directly into the doctor's eyes. "I want an honest answer," I said. "Am I going to live?"

"Such a question from a healthy young man! Such an insult to my handiwork!"

"I didn't mean to insult you," I said. "I'm sorry. Will I be impotent?" I thought such a question was probably the normal response of one whose pubic hair had been shaved.

"No," he said. "You'll have a dozen children."

"I have a Luger pistol," I said. "You make this a good operation, one that won't make me impotent, and I tell you what. You can have that Luger pistol."

"It's a deal," he said. "A Luger pistol is just what I need."

"Am I acting the way I should?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, placing a mask over my face. "You're higher than a kite. Breathe deeply and you'll go higher yet," and I breathed in the ether that had made me sick when I had been a child in Arkansas and the doctor had lanced both my ears. I wanted to tell him to use something else to put me to sleep, that my ears were all right now and that I didn't want to be ashamed for throwing up all over the starched sheets and pillow cases. I started to struggle; but Dr. Buckley in Little Rock was holding my arms. "Breathe deep, breathe deep," he drawled, and I was a little boy in a racing car that roared off the road into a ditch.

A Russian was trilling sweetly from the roof of the freight car. "God bless you," I said. Blood dripped from his stump. I floated past him on a cloud. I knew it a trite thing to be doing, floating on that cloud, but there it was. I vomited all over the trite cloud. "I told you so," I said reproachfully. Hitler, all in red and with horns, rose up through the cloud and came at my belly with a pitchfork. "Trite! Trite!" I screamed at him. Held down

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by my thick umbilical cord, I could not get away from him. I tried to yank the rubber tube out of my belly. "Don't touch that," a voice warned. Dark came and light came and another voice, a gentle Southern voice that I mistook at first for Dr. Buckley's, was praying. "Dear Jesus Christ," it prayed politely, "please in your mercy let me have a B.M." "Who is that praying?" I asked the nurse. "He was shot in the stomach," she said. The prayer went on all that day and night, but growing fainter. Another voice was screaming in German. "That sounds like a girl," I said to the nurse. "They've been using children," she said. "He's scared, but it's only his leg." The doctor roared from a distance, "If that little Nazi coward doesn't shut up, tell him I'll personally tie his hands together so tight he'll have something to cry about. God damn it, *make him shut up.*" "I gave him my Luger pistol," I said, and began to weep. "Hush," the nurse said. "He's been operating for three days with hardly any rest, and the lieutenant just died." "What lieutenant?" "The one that was praying," she said. I asked, "Did the child kill the lieutenant?" "That child, or another," she said. "That's all they have left."

Because of a shortage of beds, I was evacuated by air that day to a station hospital in England. I was in a fever and drunk with morphine. The care was excellent and I recovered rapidly.

While I was driving to work the other morning, my car slipped just a trifle on the icy highway—it was late March, already spring, and I had not thought the rain would freeze on the asphalt—and immediately I was back on a German road and the jeep had just hit the trap and was veering into the field and rolling over. My foot trembled on the gas pedal. I make that response perhaps a dozen times a year, whenever a wheel slips on ice or gravel, and each time I am angry with myself. A person should carry away from a serious accident more than an instinctive response. But the experience had been devoid of meaning; in my role as victim I became simply what I thought was expected of me. As I knew even as I had them, my very nightmares were stereotypes. If only I could convince myself now that I had *imagined* the lieutenant's prayer, the boy's screams, the doctor's threat! Distortion of reality is at least personality. But I remain convinced of the truth of those events. Reflections of this sort I find strangely disturbing. They make me nervous; I pace about the room.

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The writer who moves me most deeply is Chekhov. I like especially those tales of antithetical characters who meet by chance as they wander across immense plains, or as they travel upon the sea. In one story, a wanderer wakes in the middle of the night in a strange room in a peasant village to see a white cow in the open door. She is banging her horn against the jamb. Such images remain forever in the mind. This is the story in which the wanderer is a dispassionate creature, a man of God who is travelling across Russia begging money to rebuild his burned church. The opposing character is a near idiot, a compulsive liar and thief. While the man of God is sleeping, the thief, of course, steals the rubles intended for the church; but he returns, full of vodka, to await his victim's awakening. He returns so that he may be accused of the crime; for clearly he finds his vindication, indeed his comfort, in the resentment he arouses by his transgressions, in the ensuing quarrels and the ultimate punishment handed out by his parents, the villagers, the political authorities. But the man of God does not care; he will not fight or even argue. The matter, he tells the other, is simply between him and God. And he leaves the village with his horse-drawn cart containing an ikon and the tin money box, the thief following after, trying to draw him into anger and debate. The man of God is as impersonal and as indifferent as the natural world, as remote and as austere as the sky above them both. He remains so even after the other confesses the theft and begs forgiveness. The thief falls in terror to the ground; he weeps, he calls the man of God his kinsman, his grandfather, his uncle. Troubled, the man of God looks for a moment at the sky and feels frightened himself. "He was frightened," says Chekhov, "and he felt pity for the thief"; and so he tells the other the conventional ritual that man has established in the face of the incomprehensible Authority. If the thief will confess to the priest, if he will make a penance, if he will do this and that. . . . It is noon at the end of the story; the two have reached the next town, where the thief, recovered, quarrels in the tavern with the drunken peasants and calls for the police. One can imagine the man of God moving onward into the immense afternoon landscape, a small figure growing ever smaller. Chekhov thought so little of the tale that he left it out of his collected edition. In another story, the antithetical characters are patients in a ship's infirmary on the long voyage from the Far East to their

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homeland. One of them is a discharged Army orderly, a simple person who has been content to obey his superiors, who has no complaints and who accepts without question the most superstitious beliefs. The other is an irritable rationalist, an intellectual who rails against the injustice and tyranny to be found everywhere. Both die; their deaths are handled laconically. In the next to the last paragraph, the body of the orderly, covered in sailcloth and weighted with iron, sinks deeper and deeper as pilot fish circle about it and a shark rips the cloth; in the final paragraph the sunset above the waters is described. Chekhov imparts whatever human characteristics he can to the world of water: the pilot fish are in "ecstasy," the ocean "frowns." The clouds are given fanciful resemblances—one is an arch, one a lion, one something as domestic as a pair of shears. But all such attempts to find kinship and meaning in nature must fail, and the colors of the sunset, as they reflect upon the ocean, have a beauty—these are the last words of the story—"for which it is hard to find a name in the language of man." What does it matter, if one man accepts his condition and another protests against it? The conclusion of the story is terrible in its detachment and beauty, in its suggestion of an order far removed from human impulse and value. Whatever flaws I find in Chekhov I blame on his translators.

I have a retentive mind for wayward and useless things such as stray newspaper items, fillers among the daily reports of war and politics. One night twelve years ago, I ate dinner with my family at the Eagle's Nest restaurant on Main Street—Highway 60—in Morehead, Kentucky. I remember the taste of the chicken and hot biscuits and honey; I remember as well the display case with its Lifesavers and Beechnut gum. I remember the outline of the hill in the moonlight as we stepped outside, and I can tell anybody precisely where our car was parked. I remember all of this trivia because I had picked up a Louisville *Times* and read, while waiting by the cash register to pay my bill, the story of a Mexican who rented his town's bullfight stadium and then built a cross and had himself brutally affixed upon it. He was carried to the stadium, and his wife and children collected admission money at the gates from curious townspeople and tourists. Unfavorable publicity made the local officials cancel his contract, so his family carted him home on his cross and installed him inside. The

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curious still had to pay. He was, I believe, five days nailed to his cross, and came down prosperous. Reading the account, I thought, this is the end of something. I did not think of myself as a believing Christian, whatever I put down, for sake of identification, on the forms and questionnaires that all of us spend so much time filling out; and yet that news item was a personal threat—it diminished my personality in some subtle way and like an illness left me more susceptible to various kinds of contagion. I continue to hope the story false; or if it isn't, that the Mexican was desperate, that his family was starving. I hope he didn't do it for a Ford or a Chevie.

When I lived in Kentucky I knew of a man who became so obsessed with the dual sense of the immensity of the universe and the smallness of our planet that he developed the fear that any sudden motion, even an unexpected hiccough, might send him flying into space. He walked gingerly, holding railings and touching store fronts as if he were blind, and finally was reduced to a baby's crawl. He was mad, but that is not to say his actions were beyond understanding to anybody who feels, as I think Chekhov did, that personality—whether one is a man of God, a thief, an orderly or an intellectual—is a conscious and unconscious arrangement of attitudes and beliefs to serve as bulwark against the incomprehensible concepts of infinite time and infinite space. I consider myself a sensible person; and yet in moments of depression I can imagine the unique self to which I hold on so dearly in danger of being sucked off at any instant into the near vacuum of black space. Except, thank God, for a sense of horror, I once melted, vanished wholly away, in the swarm of a Long Island beach on an August afternoon, the quiet dispersal of my atoms accompanied less by the sound of the eternal wash of the sea than by the whisper of thousands of transistor radios each advertising the same used car. I like to look at the planets through a telescope of my own devising, because to frame them within a magnifying lens is to make them one's own; and I highly recommend, for looking at the constellations, a plastic gadget called a Starfinder. It comes in a small cardboard box with a series of transparent discs, each showing a separate constellation and naming all the stars in it. The observer peers into the Starfinder with one eye, to see the constellation of his choice illuminated

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by a faint red light within the little tunnel of plastic. He holds The Starfinder upward, attempting to locate with the other eye the same constellation in the night sky. Suddenly, as if by miracle, the two eyes, which have been in danger of becoming crossed, come into focus and the observer discovers that high in the heavens the name of each star is printed beside it, and that the outlines of Bear or Hunter are traced in such a manner that the most obtuse can see the mythological figure. (Long before I knew about Orion and his hunting prowess, I was nearly killed by him. I was driving, alone, from Lexington, Kentucky, where my wife had just given birth to our second son, to our home in Morehead—a seventy-mile trip in an easterly direction—after midnight in late October. I was relaxed and happy. The three stars of Orion's belt, bright through the windshield, drew me toward them, emptied me of all feeling. I went off the shoulder of the road twice, drifted over the center line almost into the twin circles of a truck's glare, and finally pulled into the parking lot of a hilltop church to get out of the car and stare down those fierce and lovely and lonely stars.) A Starfinder costs a couple of bucks or so, a reasonable price for a device that can completely humanize the universe.

If I were Chekhov, I might have invented a character—let's call him Jimski, for my first name is James: I was named for my father's father and I have given the same name to the third of my sons—who is, say, out for a walk in the country with a friend. Jimski tells his friend that his horse slipped and fell on the ice that morning, a trivial accident that immediately reminded him of the wound he received years before in one war or another, and of his inability to be profound on the occasion of his near-death. Jimski is in despair, conscious of the press of the universe upon him and of the shallowness of his own nature. He recounts a number of depressing incidents, each of which is intended to reinforce his view that personality is at best a precarious affair, a temporary expedient against negation. . . . Jimski wipes his nose and sighs. His friend Rodneyovitch—my middle name is Rodney, that being the name of the hero of an adventure novel my father read as a boy—is, while sympathetic, made of sterner and more practical stuff. He is, in other words, the antithetical character. "Jimski," he says, after shooting his gun aimlessly (for

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they are hunting quail), "what you say about the vagueness of our natures is false. Each of us has a built-in obsession, a monster within that shapes our facial expressions, that gives a special look to our noses and mouths and yes, to the way we gesticulate and walk. We try to keep this monster hidden from the world and if possible from ourselves, even though its mark is everywhere upon us and we cannot be free of it until we die. Don't you know of moments when this secret of another's identity has been suddenly revealed to you? Listen while I tell you. . . ." And Rodneyovitch, that garrulous fellow, begins his own series of sad tales, two of which—taken out of my own experiences and not yet transformed into their Russian context—can be summarized as typical examples:

Item 1. Concerning a mail orderly of an anti-tank platoon to which I was assigned for several months in World War II. He had no friends and apparently desired none. The platoon thought him a sadist. Both in training camp and abroad he would postpone as long as possible the distribution of mail. Finally he would climb upon a table or file case and cry imperiously for silence. He dispensed the letters with a flourish, as if each were a token of his personal largess. If a soldier became angry at his tyrannical slowness, he was apt to leave his perch for an hour or so, taking all the mail with him; and he was known to have withheld letters for several days from any person who displeased him. His platoon wished to murder him; he was beaten up on at least one occasion. In eastern France he appeared late one night during a snowstorm at divisional headquarters, to which I had been transferred, to pick up some packages—a task anybody else would have delayed until the following morning. We saw him suddenly fall to the ground, threshing in helpless convulsions, his little packages skittering over the snow. A medic wedged open his mouth to keep him from biting off his tongue. The mail orderly had managed to conceal until that moment the fact that he was an epileptic. Afterwards, in tears, he begged that he be permitted to remain overseas with his buddies, to whom he thought himself of use; but he was immediately shipped home. I never heard of him again.

Item 2. Concerning a former field artillery captain. In my graduate school years, I lived for a brief period with my wife and infant son in a barracks apartment in a university housing area.

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Every adult male resident of that area was a war veteran and a father. Some families, of course, had two or even more children; the housing area, surrounded by a stout fence with self-locking gates for the safeguarding of the infants, was little more than a gigantic playpen. A rumor developed that two voyeurs, a Mutt and a Jeff, were wandering around the area after midnight. It was said that Jeff climbed on Mutt's shoulders to peer into the high windows of the barracks; Mutt apparently was so tall that he needed no assistance. It was also said that they were most likely to appear when a light flashed on in a bedroom late at night, for what they wished above all to see was a mother giving the milk of her breast to her child. Not much would have come of the rumors had it not been for a former field artillery captain, an older student of military bearing. He had two children. One of them, a girl of six or so, played jump rope by the hour just outside her door, but the other child, a son a year younger, was never seen. The notion of the pair of peeping Toms filled this ex-captain with a strange hatred. "Beasts," he would say of them with a snarl and a fastidious curl of the lip. "Dirty beasts." He lurked outside a friend's apartment all one night while the friend obediently clicked on and off the bedroom light. The friend's child screamed, waking the nearby families. There was quite a racket from the babies that night. Using his military experience, the undaunted ex-captain devised an elaborate communications network for capturing the pair. When any resident of the housing area saw a loiterer late at night, he was to call a certain telephone number; the person phoned was in turn to get in touch with another, and so on until the whole male populace had been alerted. Two men, designated in advance, were to conceal themselves behind the garbage cans at each of the three gates, while the other husbands were to form an advancing line that, moving from one end of the area to the other, would flush out the culprits. When this strategy produced nothing but false alarms and indignant protests from trapped but innocent prey—guests to the area, lost in the maze of corrugated huts—the ex-captain issued a daily password to all residents; and, with a few dedicated cronies, kept a vigil in the bushes at night. The loathing of the ex-captain for the Toms, the extraordinary measures he had taken (he had warned, in one of his mimeographed communiques, that we were not to lose our heads and shoot to kill those who might turn out

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to be the wrong persons), kept us, even in daylight hours, from looking in confidence at anything but our own feet; no man dared to smile at a pretty girl without turning to the nearest bush and shouting, "Swallow of the north woods," or whatever the password happened to be. In short, husbands and wives began to feel guilt that they were male and female, sex itself became sinful. "Beasts! Dirty beasts!" That was all we could hear. Who were the dirty beasts? Were we? Was the ex-captain? I am sure that very few babies were conceived in the area for the month that terror reigned. Finally, of course, normality returned. A little garbage collector was jailed for indecent exposure in another barracks area. "They've caught Jeff," the ex-captain crowed. I happened to be passing his apartment when he heard the news; the wide double doors were open, and standing within I saw, for the first time, his younger child. The boy's head was tipped, his thin little arms were extended before his body like an ape's, he was drooling. I said stupidly, "Is he sick?" "We love him," the ex-captain said angrily. "The doctors were at fault, though of course they deny it. We've checked the genealogy and for generations there's been no trace, I tell you absolutely no trace; it had to be the forceps when he was born," and he slammed the doors shut and stood in front of them, erect and alert as a sentry. "They've caught the small one, the pressure's on, and by God I bet the other beast has swum the Mississippi by now!"

As I say, these are stories of the kind Rodneyovitch would tell, and you must believe me when I also say he could go on with them all afternoon, quail whizzing to safety to the right and left of his boots as he and his friend Jimski plod on. Possibly such tales should be seen as unconscious distortions of experience, each made to fit neatly into a preconceived and melancholy idea about personality. And what of consequence distinguishes Rodneyovitch's view that the monster within gives us unique identity from Jimski's that personality is but a precarious stay against negation? Rodneyovitch's argument is hardly an optimistic one. Actually we can find more that is affirmative in the melodramatic remark we can attribute to Jimski that once when happiness made him unwary the hunter in the sky nearly bagged him: for is there not the implication that he was drawn upward in communion with those strange and distant jewels that are the hunter's belt? Jimski looks outward and Rodneyovitch inward, one haunted

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by vacuum and the other by viscera. What else is there to say? The two walk on, their debate becoming pointless, merging into one statement as they themselves shrink into a single dot on the horizon.

It was, you will remember, a trivial slip on the ice that set me off on this particular road. It seems to have brought me to the point where I exist as a brace of bushy-faced foreigners who, if they are to become one, must be viewed as the product of a Russian writer's synthesizing mind. This is odd, and I won't wholly accept it; but I suppose that if we pursue ourselves too far, searching for a personal truth, we are apt to become fictive. I once knew an eighteenth-century scholar, a man given to a blunt kind of self-searching, who ended up the very model of Boswell's Samuel Johnson, and whose last years were severely disturbed by his uncertainty as to who he was.

I, Jimski-Rodneyovitch or whatever, am defined by my contradictions. A man given at times to violent passions, I nevertheless look forward as a clear necessity to a new political entity, one that encompasses a whole world at peace. Though a religious skeptic, I find Christian imagery diffusing into my thoughts and dreams. I know from experience that newspapers distort and sentimentalize—but for years I carried in my billfold a newspaper clipping, a photograph of two dogs crossing a street. The clipping has disintegrated, but I still remember the caption:

> DOG'S BEST FRIEND—Flash, a blind greyhound, is led across a Southampton, England, street by his own "seeing eye" dog, a fox terrier named Peggy. The small dog's ability to serve as a guide for the greyhound has saved the latter from being destroyed by local authorities. Peggy, in turn, was saved from destruction several years ago by Mr. G. Corbin of Southampton. It is truly a new life for both dogs.

In short, I continue to believe, whatever the opposing evidence, in a universal brotherhood. Yet I have moved to a sparsely-populated corner of a county in upstate New York, and as of this month I own nearly all the farm and woodlands surrounding my house. Now no poor farmer, no struggling graduate student, can build a shack or put in a trailer to disturb my view of the distant hills; and my second son, the one born in Kentucky, has already made "No Hunting" signs in his junior high print

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class to keep out those stout and fluorescent hunters from the city who clumsily commune with nature each deer season. Do these contraditions, as well as that related one between Jimski and Rodneyovitch, cancel out, leaving only the dry taste of irony as the heritage of the years since I lay in a field hospital in Germany?

Listen. For the past three afternoons—the cold spring rains having momentarily ceased—my wife and I and our youngest son have been exploring our new woods. We have found a grove of cedars, a stream full of rushing water from the still-melting snow, a deer trail leading down a slope into a glen that holds, in addition to a tiny field, cherry trees deformed by age—did a house once stand nearby?—and a marsh in which cattails grow. Yesterday my wife cut red rags into strips so that, before the all-concealing leaves come out, we could mark the most accessible route for a path we will hack through the saplings in the long days of summer. The school bus had not yet brought our older sons home, so we left a note on the door telling them that if they wished to find us they would have to follow the strips of red cloth into the woods. We were in the glen in the center of the woods when we heard the first faint cries of our older boys. We sat silently in a nest of dry weeds, listening to the nearby rush of the stream and the approaching sound of the boys as they crackled through the tangled underbrush toward us. Several burrs were caught in my wife's graying hair. Our child's head barely protruded above the weeds; his eyes were round and glowing with the sense of our shared secret and with the expectancy that we would be found. For a moment I had the extraordinary sense of completion. I was a clear identity, a man of blood and soul, sitting with two of the people I loved and awaiting the other two. The glen did not become the center of the universe; from this secret navel no mystic cloak of unity moved out in waves to descend on every man and animal and tree here on earth or on the strange creatures sitting on their haunches or crawling across the vast plateaus of the dark and unknown planets circling Alpha Centauri. It was a limited victory, one that vanished as quickly as it came; but it was there, and worth the seeking. Between tasks more crucial to my survival, I can always hack a trail through my woods or re-read my Chekhov.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

A Meaning of Robert Lowell

A BOOK REVIEWER LOOKING AT ROBERT LOWELL'S new book, *Near the Ocean* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $6.00), for the first time would find good reasons to be annoyed with it and to say so forcibly. The book itself, for one. It is a pretentious volume; printed on expensive paper, bound in heavy cloth and stamped in three colors, decorated with twenty-one drawings by Sidney Nolan, designed lavishly and wastefully in an outsize format, jacketed in varnished sixty-pound stock—in short, a very self-conscious-looking collector's item, which might easily provoke a reviewer into making a little investigation. He could learn without difficulty, for instance, that publication of the book had been postponed several times, and that the price had been announced progressively at $4.95, $5.50, and $6.00. Why? Our reviewer would soon discover that the longest piece in the book, a translation of Juvenal's Tenth Satire, had appeared in a magazine version, in *Encounter,* only a few weeks before the book came out, and he would see significant differences between the two texts. He would surmise that last-minute revisions had been made in the poem—hence, very likely, the delays in publication—and he would wonder if other equally impetuous revisions had been made in other poems, especially the personal ones whose texts are spattered with ellipses. He would wonder also if the resetting of so much type had required the increases in price. He would read the note at the front of the book, in which Lowell, speaking of Nolan's drawings, says: "May my lines throw some light on his!" —apparently meaning that the poet hopes a certain reciprocity of example will ensue between texts and illustrations. But what a curious way to say it, what a slip of the two-edged pen. As for the drawings themselves; would indeed, our reviewer might exclaim, that the poems could illuminate them, they need it! Next he might look at the table of contents, where he would count the titles, seven poems and six translations, and wonder if readers should be asked to pony up six dollars for so small an offering

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of untried work. Finally our reviewer would turn to the texts themselves, where he would find, first, an ill-assorted group of translations from classical and Renaissance poems, not Lowell's best, and second, among the original pieces—the slight heart of this slight book—one conventional tribute to Theodore Roethke and six personal poems: strange poems, not poorly written in the usual sense, on the contrary fairly glittering with the acuity and verbal shrewdness we expect from Lowell, and yet so awkward nevertheless, so fragmentary, devious, elliptical, and even stilted that they seem—well, to make the best of it, bewildering.

How could our reviewer fail to give the book an angry notice? Hifalutin ostentation: nobody likes it. All the less do we like it in contrast to Lowell's other books, which, in their quiet formats and with their modest crosshatch illustrations by Francis Parker on the title pages, make an attractive and more reasonable appearance. *Near the Ocean* looks unmistakably like a "big production" that was supposed—if not by Lowell, by someone—to catapult the poet into the cushiest seat in stardom; as if he weren't sitting there already. But by its own overreaching, it has failed.

Our reviewer, if he had an enquiring mind, would not be satisfied simply to blast the book's appearance, however. He would wish to find out why Lowell wrote these strange new poems, and what purpose their new style is intended to serve. In short, he would change himself, if he were able, from a reviewer into a literary critic. He would study all Lowell's work, he would divide, classify, elucidate, analyze, and compare, and he would give us a schematic judgment which might or might not be useful to us, and which might or might not have something to do with the poems.

Incidentally, if he were a proper scholar, he would begin his essay with a review of previous critical opinions, which in the case of Lowell's poetry comprise a truly splendid range: from servile adulation to contumelious rejection. Obviously this hodgepodge offers a great opportunity to a critic who fancies his own rhetorical prowess.

For my part, I am no critic. More's the pity perhaps, because I do find, like our hypothetical reviewer, that I am unwilling to rest on the simple distaste aroused in me by Lowell's new work,

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a distaste which is uncertain, at that, inconsistent and unformed. I would like to know more. In consequence I must attack the poems in the only way I can, namely, as a fellow poet, someone who has worked the same side of the street for roughly the same period, and who presumably knows something about the difficulties of the job. This is what I propose to do, i.e., to look at the poems less as finished works than as objects coming into being. Indeed, for reasons I shall elaborate, I think this is the only way one can look at Lowell's work of the past fifteen years.

The risks in my method are great, of course. One is that I shall stray from my literary topic into what is normally considered personal or biographical. To those who may charge me with this, I give two answers. First, I shall not stray far because I do not know Lowell personally, having met him only twice, for a few minutes each time and at an interval of more than a decade. My knowledge of the man comes either directly or by inference from his own writing, and from what I have heard during twenty years on the edge of the literary world. Secondly, in dealing with poetry as personal as Lowell's, or as personal as most poetry written nowadays in America, the risk of infringing upon the poet's privacy is properly speaking no risk at all. An invitation has been extended to us: why shouldn't we accept it?

The place to begin then, I think, is with a biographical datum. Robert Lowell is, and for some years has been, the most envied poet in the country. The consequences of this are many, but for the moment I wish simply to enforce the fact. I envy Lowell. Everywhere I go among literary people I meet only others who envy Lowell. The reasons for it are obvious enough: his great advantages. First, the advantage of his birth in a distinguished family. One does not wish to insist on this, but at the same time it is not negligible. No doubt being born with a ready-made cultural and social status is sometimes a hindrance, but often it is a help too, and in our hearts most of us would be glad to put up with the one if we could thereby attain the other. Secondly, the advantage of talent and intelligence. I am not speaking of the particular concrete expressions of these properties, but of the properties themselves. From the first Lowell's poetry has had an inner force bespeaking his great native gifts. It has put him in

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the class of wonder boys, along with poets like the early Auden and Dylan Thomas who, however idiotic they may sometimes look in other respects, were simply unable to write a trite or flaccid line. Most of us must cultivate poorer gardens. If we console ourselves with the idea that the best crop sometimes comes from meager soil, nevertheless we yearn often enough, in our adverse labor, for the facility of mere brilliance. Thirdly, the advantage of success. Let anyone say what he will, Lowell is our leading poet. It is a fact. He has power, influence, and an enormous reputation. His books, for example, are kept in print and they sell steadily—what a joy that must be! We all, I know, are reasonable creatures, and we realize that success is more often a nuisance than a blessing. But are we so inhuman that we deny our envy of those who have it? I hope not.

Envy is a tricky thing, of course. It takes many directions. At bottom it accounts, I believe, for ninety per cent of the critical response to Lowell's work, the wide range of opinions, and it accounts too for the concentration of responses at the extremes of the scale: adulators at one end, detractors at the other. As for the adulators . . . but why not call them by their right name, the flatterers? In their multitude we dismiss them; and we need add only that although their opinion in the long run may turn out to be right, and Lowell's poetry may be seen to be precisely as great as they say it is, if this happens it will be not because of, but in spite of, what they themselves are saying and doing now. The detractors, whose motives may be equally disreputable, are nevertheless forced by the nature of their position to take a more discriminative view, and hence their expressions of opinion may be actually helpful to us in making discriminations of our own. At least I shall go on that presumption.

Myself, after discounting as well as I can my own factor of envy, I find that my uncritical, workingman's response to Lowell's achievement changes from time to time but generally hovers between the two extremes. In each stage of his poetic evolution, Lowell has written a few poems that seem to me extremely fine, and he has also written poems that seem to me mannered, pointless, incomplete, and obscure. Indeed, try as I may—and I have tried again and again over the years—some of his poems, particularly his earliest and then again his latest, remain incomprehen-

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sible to me, as dark and profuse as a pot of Bostonian whistleberries. Moreover, I cannot escape the feeling that some of this obscurity has been purposely, even crassly laid on.[1] For me, this is the single largest detracting element in his work.

One point, however, I wish to make perfectly clear. Lowell's position of leadership seems to me not only to have been earned but to be altogether suitable. I say this on two counts. As a man, Lowell has given us more than enough evidence of his firmness and integrity—one thinks of his conscientious objection during the war and all that it entailed, his refusal to attend White House sociables, and many other such actions—to substantiate his moral fitness for the role. As a poet, he gives us this same integrity in art. When I read his poetry, however negative my response may be to its effect, I know I am in the presence of an artist *in extremis,* operating, I should say struggling, at the limits of sensibility and technique. This is a quality which we consider peculiarly American, a kind of hardrock Yankee pertinacity, and to me it is peculiarly attractive. Who was it that said he would fight it out on this line if it took all summer? An American military man, I believe. When I read Lowell's lines, I feel that he has fought it out upon them for years. This is tough and homely and American. It is admirable. It is what leads me to place Lowell alongside William Carlos Williams, rather then in the company of other older poets to whom he bears a closer superficial resemblance. It is also what leads me, in the perennial confrontation of artists and the rest of the world, to rest content under his leadership. If my standing behind him will add to the strength of his position, he may be sure I am there.

So much for preliminary considerations. The phases of Lowell's poetic evolution are so well-known that I need indicate them only briefly. We may dismiss his first book, *Land of Unlikeness,* which was published in a limited edition that few people have seen; Lowell himself effectively dismissed it when he republished its main poems, considerably revised, in *Lord Weary's Castle,* the book that established him with one shot as a leader of his generation. Written in the first flush of enthusiasm after his conversion to Catholicism, the poems were highly charged devotional

[1] Lowell has admitted as much. See his *Paris Review* interview.

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lyrics mixed with autobiographical elements, presented in an elaborate formal dress: close rhymes, exact meters, a heavy reliance on couplets, and an equally heavy reliance on the rhetoric of allusion. It was a virtuoso performance. At its best, in perhaps a fourth of the poems, it showed a young poet writing with genuine spontaneity in the strict forms of the English metaphysical convention, while bringing to them his own distinct voice and idiosyncratic manner. In short, Lowell had done what everyone had been saying could not be done: he had invented a new style. In his next book, *The Mills of the Kavanaughs,* he stuck with it, but most readers considered the book a falling-off, especially the long title poem. What this poem, a dramatic narrative in monologue, showed was that the ability to sustain narrative tension across the librations of discrete pentameter couplets is lost to us: the suspension bridge has replaced the viaduct.

Lowell waited eight years to publish his next book. Then, in 1959, he presented us with a change of appearance so radical that it seemed a reversal. The formal manner was gone; no pentameters, no rhymes, no ornate rhetoric. The book, called *Life Studies,* which more than recouped his reputation, gave us instead poems in open, loose measures, without rhyme, in a diction that seemed easy and almost insouciant. The heart of the book was a group of autobiographical poems so intensely candid that critics immediately called them "confessional"; an unfortunate choice of terms. It implied that Lowell was engaged in public breast-beating, a kind of refreshing new psycho-exotic pastime, or in a shallow exercise of "self-expression," long ago discredited; whereas in fact his aim was far more serious than that.

The following two collections of poems, *For the Union Dead* in 1964 and *Near the Ocean* this year, have continued to explore themes of autobiographical candor, but have gradually reverted toward formalism. Not the conventional formalism of *Lord Weary's Castle,* however. Now the meters, though basically iambic, are cast in rough lines of trimeter and tetrameter, punctuated with purposefully inexact rhymes. The diction is more extreme, more peculiar and concise, than in *Life Studies,* and the syntax has become progressively more taut, split up into smaller and smaller units. This has gone so far in the latest poems that one can scarcely find a complete sentence from stanza to

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stanza, but only phrases, expletives, stabs of meaning. The effect, although entirely different from the high style of *Lord Weary's Castle,* nevertheless brings us back to an obscurity and artifice that seem to denote another reversal; the simplicity of *Life Studies* has been jettisoned.

In effect, Lowell made, in *Life Studies,* a considerable leap into a new area of poetic experience, which he has been exploring, since then, through increasingly elaborate means. Why he did this, what was in his mind, are questions readers must try to answer if they would understand the actual meaning of Lowell's experiment.

I have said nothing about the translations, perhaps because they are a source of embarrassment to me. Over the years Lowell has made a good many, including a couple of long ones and a whole book of short ones, from many languages, called *Imitations.* When this book was published in 1961, I reviewed it enthusiastically. The density and tonicity of the best translations took hold of me and persuaded me that Lowell had reached far toward the intrinsic qualities of the original poems, especially in his Baudelaires. Since then, my friends who know Baudelaire better than I have informed me with cogency that this is not true, and that I had no business reviewing such a book in the first place. Well, they are right on both counts, as I have ruefully come to see. Aside from the intended alterations of sequence and literal meaning which Lowell acknowledges, there is, for instance, the way in which Baudelaire's characteristic elegance, deriving from the fluent, almost sinuous build-up of stanzas and longer passages, is fragmented and rigidified in Lowell's choppy phrasings. And there is the way, too, in which Baudelaire's post-romantic sense of beauty is both reduced and roughened in its passage through Lowell's anguish-ridden, New Englander's sensibility; the flowers of evil become merely evil flowers—a considerable difference when you stop to think about it. Lowell's detractors seize on these points, and others, as ammunition for their campaign, which is made easier by the evident inferiority, when judged against any standard, of some of the translations. The Villons are quite bad, the Rimbauds and Pasternaks barely passable. But I continue to feel that the best of the Baudelaires, Rilkes, and Montales are excellent Lowells indeed, and this is all he had claimed for

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them. He does not call them translations, but imitations. Perhaps he should have gone further and specified that what he was imitating was not the poetry of Baudelaire or Rilke or the rest, but the poetry of Lowell; perhaps he should have chosen another title, e.g., *Appropriations* or *Assimilations*. No matter; the point is that Lowell has made a perfectly legitimate effort to consolidate his own poetic view of reality by levying upon congenial authentications from other languages and cultures. The best of his translations go together with the best of *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead* to comprise the nucleus of his mature work, the organic unity of which must be apprehended by those who wish to form reliable judgments.

Even at the most superficial level of technique, the prosodic level, Lowell's evolution, both his successes and his failures, offers a fascinating study to people who are interested in the disciplines of poetry. This is usually the case when important poets change styles. Consider Lowell's commonest prosodic device, the suspended or Hopkinsian upbeat produced by ending a line on the first syllable of a new unit of syntax, a phrase or sentence. He made it work well, not to say famously, in his early poems, but when he abandoned strict pentameters he had more trouble with it. How do you employ this very useful concept of metrical enjambment when your line-structure has been purposely unfixed? It is the old story: you can't have your cake and eat it too. Simple as it appears, this is a crucial problem, perhaps *the* crucial problem, of contemporary unmetered poetry, which different poets have met in many different ways. Some have adopted the practice of reading their poems with abrupt pauses at the end of each line, but this is an oral stratagem that seems to have little connection with the actual dynamics of the poem. Denise Levertov has gone further by developing her concept of "organic form," which appears, however, to be incompletely worked out at this stage.[2] Like her, Lowell has preferred to work on the page, i.e., within the poem's prosodic structure; but with indifferent success in many instances. Conceivably such a simple matter as this, which is nevertheless extremely important in terms of Lo-

[2] Miss Levertov assumes a base in Charles Olson's "projective verse," of course, but to my mind Olson's ideas are even more unfulfilled (and unfulfillable).

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well's natural style, lies behind his recent return to more exact, or more exacting, meters.

But that is a topic for another discussion. What I am interested in here is something prior to poetry. Before a man can create a poem he must create a poet. Considered from the limited perspective of artistry, this is the primal creative act.

Imagine Lowell seated at his work-table on some ordinary morning in 1950. *Lord Weary's Castle* has been out for four years; already its triumph is a burden. The poems in *The Mills of the Kavanaughs,* now at the press, have been finished for a year or more, and are beginning to slip into the past, to seem stale, remote, and incidental—like the verses of one's friends. Now I have no idea what Lowell would be doing in such circumstances, probably brooding and daydreaming like the rest of us, but for the moment let me ascribe to him a simple, orderly, godlike self-mastery that neither he nor you nor I nor Charles de Gaulle can claim in actuality. In 1950, given that marvelous perspicacity, he would have had to ask himself two questions. In essence, what is my theme? In general, what is my defect?

One does not ask these questions once and then go on to something else, one asks them over and over, as one asks all unanswerable questions. A serious poet moves progressively toward his essential theme, though he can never reach it, by means of exclusions, peeling away, from poem to poem, the inessential, working down to bedrock; and he examines every word he writes for clues to his defect. In the case of Lowell we cannot doubt that he works in such a state of constant tension and self-interrogation. Yet it seems clear to me, even so, that at some point around 1950 he must have asked these questions with special intentness. Nothing else can account for the change of poetic stance so strikingly evident in *Life Studies.*

What had Lowell set out to do in his first poems? He had set out explicitly, I think, though ingenuously, to build on the Donne-to-Hopkins tradition of devotional poetry in English, to write poems of faith. The evidence, in the poems themselves, is unmistakable. Consequently he had produced a rather large number of set pieces in a high style, such as the poems about Jonathan Edwards and other historical figures or events, affirming a public, devotional aspiration. This is what all young poets do, isn't it?

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They begin, or at least they try to begin, where the mature poets they admire left off. They do this in the compulsion of their literary zeal, in spite of the evident unfeasibility of it, owing to the irremediable disparity of experience. At the same time Lowell interspersed among his devotional pieces various autobiographical elements, usually disguised and highly wrought, set out in the same taut, allusive, difficult style as the rest, but genuine autobiography nevertheless. I think it must have become evident to him by 1950 that in spite of the very great but purely literary success of the devotional set pieces, these autobiographical poems were the more alive, the more interesting, and ultimately the more comprehensible.

Poems like "Mr. Edwards and the Spider" and "After the Surprising Conversions" are good specimens of their kind, but like all their kind they are sententious. That is to say, a large part of their meaning is a stable and predictable element of the general cultural situation, with which the poems are, so to speak, invested. (And under "meaning" I intend the entire affective and cognitive experience of the poem.) But the autobiographical poems or partly autobiographical poems, like "Mary Winslow" and "At the Indian Killer's Grave," work themselves out in their own terms, within their own language; and in spite of the high gloss of artifice that remains upon them, they speak with urgency.

All this is even more evident today, fifteen years later. The most prominent motifs of the poems in *Lord Weary's Castle* are the Christ, the Crucifix, and the Virgin; they are repeated on almost every page. Yet they remain inert. They are not personal realizations, they are not symbols, they are merely tokens (which perhaps, in the tradition Lowell had chosen, is all they can be). The personal motifs, on the other hand—personal guilt, personal death, personal time, personal violence and desire—are what carry the poet along, and they are connected, not with devotional aspirations, but with his experienced life. He returns to them again and again in poems about himself, about his mother and the Winslow family, and about his father, Commander Lowell. In *Life Studies* he simply relinquished one set of motifs, the former, and took up the other. The resulting augmentation of his poetic stature—his personal stature as creator within the domain of his poetic materials—was enormous.

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As I say, Lowell cannot discover the precise specifications of his theme, which is lucky for him. If he were to do so, he would be clapped into silence instantly. Nor can we do it for him, which is equally lucky. All we can do is brood, as he does, over his lines and the shadows behind them, tracking down the motifs to see where they lead. In my own recent brooding I turn especially to two lines from the poem called "Night Sweat" in *For the Union Dead:*

> always inside me is the child who died,
> always inside me is his will to die . . .

Simple enough; explicit enough. They are one expression of the radical guilt which seems to lie at the base of Lowell's poetic nature. It is a guilt which took form like any other, leaving aside psychoanalytical factors: first from elements of generalized cultural guilt, in Lowell's case the New Englander's shame over the Indians and the Salem women, which has exercized an obviously powerful influence on his imagination; then from guilt that all men feel, with deep necessity, for the deaths of their own fathers; and finally from the horrendous events of contemporary history. But what is the punishment for the crimes that produce this pervading guilt? It is personal death. We all know this, from the first moment of our mortal recognition. Yet against this Lowell casts again and again his instinctive belief in the remission of sin, or rather his knowledge, his feeling, of his own undiminished innocence. Then what can our death be? What is our guilt? There is only one answer, outside of absurdity. Our death is our sin, for which we pay in advance through our guilt. Our death is a crime against every good principle in the universe: nature, God, the human heart. Yet we, the innocent, are the responsible ones—this is the idea Lowell cannot forego. We carry this crime, like a seed, within us. Our bodies are going to commit it, do what we will. They are going to carry out this murder, inexorably, while we stand by, helpless and aghast.

This is the ultimate Yankee metonymy, you might say. Puritan death as punishment for sin contracts, under the paradox of benign Transcendentalism, to death as sin. Naturally it is a theological monstrosity. It is impossible. Yet in the human and poetic sphere, it is a validity of staggering force.

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Well, all this is highly conjectural, of course. There are scores of other, doubtless better ways to approach Lowell's theme, I'm sure. Yet I feel this progressive identification of sin, guilt, and death can be traced fairly directly from such poems as "At the Indian Killer's Grave" to "Night Sweat" and beyond. The two lines I have quoted strike close to it. They are literal. When Lowell says "inside" I think he means inside: he is carrying this sin-death around in him like a monstrous illegitimate pregnancy. I would almost bet that if he suffers the common nightmare of artists, the dream of male parturition, it is a dead thing that comes out (at which point, if he hasn't awakened, his dream may be suffused with bliss).

Meanwhile Lowell has his defect, for which he should give thanks. It permits him to relax into the mercy of technical self-criticism. Not that it is easy to deal with; quite the contrary. Like all fundamental defects, it is a function of his personality, and hence wears many faces. I call it the defect of pervasive extraneity; but it could have other names. One aspect of it was quite clear, however, in *Lord Weary's Castle:* the laid-on metaphysical obscurity. This was the fashion of poetry at the time, and Lowell accommodated himself to it easily and naturally; and without the least poetic infidelity. We must bear in mind in considering fashion that a fashion during the period of its ascendancy is not a fashion; it is merely what is right. In composing the poems of *Lord Weary's Castle,* Lowell had no sense, I'm certain, of doing anything but what was necessary. He had no sense of *doing* anything at all, except writing poetry as it is written. Nevertheless, the obscurity, like the ornate style and the use of inert figures from a general cultural conspectus, was clearly extraneous to his main themes and objectives, as he could see five or six years later, and he gave it up; this was his defect and he chopped off its head. But it sprang up elsewhere, hydra-like. Other aspects of it were more difficult to see. For instance, in the title poem from *The Mills of the Kavanaughs,* he had shown his inability to sustain the long units of poetry, and at the same time his great talent for the short units: the line and phrase and isolated image. These are his forte. Lowell can rap out a single sharp line with extraordinary facility. The trouble is that these brilliant strokes may contribute nothing to the whole fabric and intention of a poem; they may be merely extraneous—pervasively extraneous because

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in spite of their irrelevance, they do sit within the total structure and they cannot be eradicated once the poem has acquired a certain degree of distinctness.

In a poem called "The Scream" from *For the Union Dead,* Lowell writes of the time when his mother gave up her mourning:

> One day she changed to purple,
> and left her mourning. At the fitting,
> the dressmaker crawled on the floor,
> eating pins, like Nebuchadnezzar
> on his knees eating grass.

We have all seen this, of course, a woman crawling on the floor, her mouth full of pins, to adjust another woman's hem, and so we are struck by the orginality of Lowell's simile. It seems to me absolutely genuine; I have never encountered it before. Hence the pins and grass collapse together spontaneously in my mind like a perfect superimposition of images. I am charmed. Only when I stop to think do I realize that Nebuchadnezzar and what he stands for have only the remotest connection with this scene, and that the dressmaker herself is a figure of no importance in the poem. As an image, this is a brilliant extraneity: the defect at work.

And what shall we say about the appearance of the new book, its crass and confused ostentation? This is gross extraneity and nothing else.

In short, Lowell's defect is a temptation to mere appearance, to effects, trappings—to the extraneous. And it arises, I believe, from a discrete imagination, i.e., an imagination which works best in disjunctive snatches. I suppose some people would call it an analytic, rather than a synthetic, imagination. His problem as a poet during the past fifteen or twenty years has been to continue digging deeper toward his essential theme, while at the same turning, if it is possible, his defect into an advantage.

So far I have been writing about Lowell as if he were an isolated case, but the reverse is the truth. He is a poet of his time. The shift of focus in his poetry has been one part, a very small part, of a general shift in artistic values and intentions during the past quarter-century.

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When was the last time in our western civilization that a writer at his work-table could look at a piece of writing and call it finished, self-enclosed and self-sustaining, autonomous—a work of art in the original sense? I'd say in poetry it must have been at the time of Pope, and in fiction, since the novel lags behind, perhaps as late as Flaubert or Turgenev; but actually no one could draw the lines so precisely. The change from one notion of art to another was very gradual. All we can say with certainty is that sometime during the nineteenth century—that changeful time!—the old idea of the enclosed work of art was dislocated in the minds of serious artists: Heine, Rimbaud, Strindberg. Such men began to see that art is always unfinished; and from this arose the concept of its a priori unfinishability, i.e., its limitlessness. For a time—quite a time—the two concepts ran side-by-side; many artists tried by various means to combine them. In the forepart of our century, for instance, we got the idea of the circularity of artistic structure, from which derived the work of art that was both limitless and enclosed: *The Waste Land* and *Finnegans Wake*. These were grandiose conceptions. They made art into something it had not been before, a world in itself.[3] They were helped along by the general collapse of values in the post-Nietzschean cultures of Europe. Some artists, despairing of their own painful nihilism, even tried to substitute for the reality of the world the anti-reality of art—or of style, the word, or whatever—believing that only by this means could they create a bearable plane upon which to enact human existence and build a consistent scheme of values. I am thinking of such men as Gottfried Benn, Céline, and Wyndham Lewis, or in a different way of Breton and the Surréalistes. Of course Hitler's war smashed all that, proving the ugliness and irresponsibility of it. Reality was reality after all. We came out of the war badly shaken, clinging to the idea of existential engagement. Henceforth, contrite as we were, we would be responsible and free, creative within the real world. Yet what could this mean in a reality over which we had no control, a reality in which we, the conscious element, possessed nothing but the lunatic knowledge of our own super-

[3] An extreme statement; in one sense art had always been a world apart. But in another the enclosed *and* limitless masterpieces of 1910-1940 did raise the possibility of an art that was not only distinct from "objective reality" but contradistinct; thus engendering a philosophical departure far more serious than the shallow Yellow-Book estheticism from which it partly sprang.

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erogation, to use Auden's terms? If anti-reality were denied us by our own responsibility, and if reality were denied us by our own alienation, what could we create? We decided—and to my mind the inevitability of it is beautiful—that what we could create was life. Human life.

It was not a retreat to anti-reality. In looking back we saw that, after Nietzsche, we had been living in a crisis of intellectual evolution, a terrible blockage and confusion; we had been absorbing what Jaspers calls "the preparing power of chaos." Now we were ready to go forward. Now, in freedom and responsibility, we began to see the meaning of what we had known all along, that a life is more than a bundle of determined experiential data. (For the biggest horror of our crisis had been the complex but empty enticements of Freudian positivism.) A life is what we make it. In its authenticity it is our own interpretation and re-organization of experience, structured metaphorically. It is the result of successive imaginative acts—it is a work of art! By conversion, a work of art is life, *provided it be true to the experiential core.* Thus in a century artists had moved from an Arnoldian criticism of life to an Existential creation of life, and both the gains and the losses were immense.

The biggest loss perhaps was a large part of what we thought we had known about art. For now we saw in exactly what way art is limitless. It is limitless because it is free and responsible: it is a life. Its only end is the adventitious cutting off that comes when a heart bursts, or a sun. Still, the individual "piece" of art must be objective in some sense; it lies on the page, on the canvas. Practically speaking, what is a limitless object? It is a fragment; a random fragment; a fragment without intrinsic form, shading off in all directions into whatever lies beyond. And this is what our art has become in the past two decades: random, fragmentary, and open-ended.

Hence in literature any particular "work" is linear rather than circular in structure, extensible rather than terminal in intent, and at any given point inclusive rather than associative in substance; at least these are its tendencies. And it is autobiographical, that goes without saying. It is an act of self-creation by an artist within the tumult of experience.

This means that many of our ideas about art must be re-examined and possibly thrown out. I have in mind not our ideas

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of technique, derived from the separate arts, but our esthetic generalizations derived from all the arts. Such notions as harmony, dynamism, control, proportion, even style in its broadest sense. How do these criteria apply to a work which is not a work at all, conventionally considered, but a fragment? I do not say they do not apply; I say the applications must be radically re-determined.

As readers, where does this leave us? In a mere subjective muddle? Sometimes it seems so. For that matter, why should we read another person's poems at all? Our life is what concerns us, not his. Is he a better observer than we, a better imaginer, a better creator? Can his self-creation of his life assist us in ours, assuming a rough equivalence of human needs and capacities? Perhaps; but these too are subjective criteria. What then?

All I can say is that the most progressive criticism we have now *is* subjective, resolutely so and in just these ways. It asks what a poem can *do* for us. The reason we have so little of it is that we are unused to such methods and fearful of them, and we do not know upon what principles to organize them. Our critics are years behind our artists, still afraid of the personal, ideal, moral, and contingent. For strangely enough, these four qualities are just what we preserve in fragments but destroy in wholes. Working philosophers know this. In a grave correspondence to human limits, an apothegm is better philosophy than an organon.

Still, I see some evidence, here and there, that the critics are beginning to stir themselves.

What Lowell thinks of all this he hasn't said. He has written almost no criticism, and apparently does not intend to write any. I salute him! But at all events we know that he has been working for twenty years in the heart of the movement I have described, among eastern writers and artists. He has been associated with the painters who gave their work the unfortunate names of abstract expressionism and action painting, and with theatrical people who have used such concepts as the happening and non-acting acting; these being half-understood designations for the artist's life-constructing function. This has been Lowell's milieu. Of course he has shared it with many other writers; what I have been discussing in terms of Lowell's work is a shift or tightening of artistic intention which cuts across every line. And one thing

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more is certain. Whatever the rationale, or whether or not there is any rationale, we cannot read Lowell's autobiographical writing, from *Life Studies* to *Near the Ocean,* without seeing that we are in touch with a writer who is in fact making his life as he goes along, and with a degree of seriousness and determination and self-awareness that surpasses the artistic confidence of any previous generation. He has resolved to accept reality, all reality, and to take its fragments indiscriminately as they come, forging from them this indissoluble locus of metaphoric connections that is known as Robert Lowell. No wonder he is enthusiastic.

Hence we see that in his translations, and for that matter in all his work, Lowell's methods are distinct from those of Ezra Pound. This is a distinction we must be careful to draw, I think, because Pound's methods have become so much second-nature to us all that they blur our recognition of the principal fact about the two poets, viz. that the historical gulf separating them is enormous. Thus when Pound wrenches and distorts Propertius in the translations from the Elegies, or when he capsulates writing from many sources in the *Cantos,* he does so in the interest of a general program of cultural aggrandisement conducted from a base of personal security. There is no uncertainty of values in the *Cantos;* in this respect the poem is as old-fashioned as *Candide* or Boethius. Nor is there any uncertainty of poetic personality. The writer—"ego, scriptor"—is a steady and reliable, if sometimes rudimentary, presence. Pound's work, in effect, is an Arnoldian criticism of life on a very grand scale, which is only possible because the critic looks out from the secure bastion of his own personality founded on a stable scheme of values. Lowell, on the other hand, is a poetic ego without fixtures: in a sense neither being nor becoming, but a sequence of fragments, like the individual frames of a movie film, propelled and unified by its own creative drive. This does not mean that Lowell's work lacks values; his poems are as strenuously moral as anyone's. But his objective is not critical, nor even broadly cultural; it is personal; and the moral elements of his poetry are used, not as precepts, but as the hypotheses of an experimental venture in self-validation. In his autobiographical work, both translations and original poems, Lowell employs many of Pound's devices, perhaps most of them, but his ends are his own—and this makes all the difference. It means a

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radically different creative outlook, issuing in new poetic justifications and criteria.

And so I return to my starting-place; for I am sure everyone knows that the hypothetical reviewer with whom I began is really myself, and that all this speculation springs from the moment when my review copy of *Near the Ocean* arrived in the mail. I have already said that I do not like the sequence of autobiographical poems which forms the heart of this new book. Let me add to this three further points.

1. Why has Lowell moved progressively away from the simplicity of *Life Studies* toward a new formalism? Is it only a reversionary impulse? Is it an attempt to give greater objectivity to the random, fragmentary materials of his autobiography by reintroducing elements of fixative convention? Is it from a desire to make fuller use of his talent, i.e., to turn his defect to advantage by emphasizing prosody and syntax? No doubt all these reasons, and others, are at work. But the result is a too great concentration of effort upon the verbal surface—to my mind very unfortunate. We now have poems which are compositions of brilliant minutiae, like mosaics in which the separate tiles are so bright and glittering that we cannot see the design. A mosaic is fine, it is the model *par excellence* for poetry in our time, but if we are to see the pattern, the separate pieces must be clear and naturally arranged; and in the best mosaics the colors are subdued rather than gaudy.

2. In point of substance I ask, still in a firmly subjective mode: what are the most useful parts of autobiography? To my mind the most interesting of Lowell's poems are those from his present, concerning his wife, divorce, children, illness, etc., but these are few and small compared to the great number about his youth and childhood, his ancestors, his visits to the family graveyard. I detect a faint odor of degenerate Freudian sentimentalism. Have we not had enough of this, and more? We are interested in the man, the present, unfinished, lively being. If the term "confessional" is to be applied to Lowell's work, although I have said why I think it is inadequate, then I suggest he has not confessed enough. In particular one topic is lacking, unless I am mistaken: his conversion to the Church of Rome and his subsequent—should I say recusancy? I hardly know. He was in and then he

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was out, and the rest for us is a mystery. Surely this touches the man. And surely it touches many issues of our time: justice, probity, the individual and the mass, the role of love in society, even peace and war. In effect, I advocate a stiffening up of autobiographical substance, a colder and more realistic view. Let the rigor now reserved for verbal superficies be applied to the exact new content of experience.

3. But judgment fails. In this art it has not found its place. If I were to suggest one ultra-technical criterion still available to a poet in Lowell's circumstances, I would say: relevance. Be random, yes, fragmentary and open-ended—these are the conditions of life—but scrutinize every component of your act of creation for its relevance. The advantage of random observation is not only in what comes but in what is let go. Avoid the extraneous like the plague. Lowell does not always manage it, and his defect is not the advantage it might be. His style, though more deeply in-wrought than before, is still too much like a shell, a carapace, an extraneity. We see again and again that the most difficult work of imagination is not when it soars in fantasy but when it plods in fact. And what a force of imagination has gone into these poems! A man's being, fought for, fragment by fragment, there on the page: this we can recognize. And we know that in such poetry the risk of failure is no longer a risk, but a surety. It must be taken, eaten. The very poem which seems most awkward to us may be the one that will wrench us away, finally, from the esthetic fixatives of the conventions of irresponsibility, and release us into responsible creation. If we read Lowell's new poems in the light of the problems he is facing, we will know that although we must, since we are human, judge them, our judgment is not something superior or separate, it is a part of his struggle, as his struggle is a part of ours. In this knowledge we may discover what we have been groping toward for centuries: not humility, which we don't need, nor magnanimity, which I hope we already have, but the competence of human freedom.

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

Modernist Architectural Space

IN THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS no word has become as important in the discussion of architecture as "space." Many major books of architectural history and criticism have included it in their titles (*Space, Time, and Architecture; Architecture as Space*), architectural practice itself is most often described in the schools as "the making of spaces," and nothing has become as easy as to assume that space has always been the basic substance of architecture and the first concern of its creators. Yet in the long history of theoretical writing on architecture none of the most prominent writers, from Vitruvius through Alberti and Filarete to Montgomery Schuyler, has so much as mentioned space as an architectural component. Given this background, it is strange that when mentioning architectural space recent critics have generally assumed it to be a known quantity. Into this gap between non-consideration of space and the uncritical assumption that space is the essential architectural element fall the most interesting and important questions—is there a definable modernist architectural space; if so, how is it to be defined; what are its historical antecedents and precedents; and what has been the history of critical interest in it?[1] Many writers—Pevsner, Zevi, Giedion, and Hitchcock, to name the foremost—have addressed themselves to the first three of these questions without distinguishing completely successfully between modernist architectural space and what preceded it or working out a wholly successful definition of what is unique about modernist space. Only one, Peter Collins *(Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750-1950)*, has, so far as I know, attempted to trace the origins of interest in architectural space. It will be the first three of the questions that concern us here.

That there is something definable as a modernist architectural space, no one living in the age of Le Corbusier can doubt. That space can be, and is in Corbusier's architecture, the very substance of architecture, and that this is a new and revolutionary idea in architectural history, is also no longer open to question. The greatest work of Corbusier provides ample definition of the nature of that space, but verbal definition is still to be extrapolated from that work and applied as theory—for theory it then becomes—to the recent history of architecture. The best critics—notably Giedion and Hitchcock—have emphasized that volume has replaced mass in modernist architecture and that the interpenetration of spaces, both horizontally and vertically, has become of vital importance. In recognizing the dissolution of mass into volume, the primacy of space is also recognized, since the impli-

[1] The word "modernist" is taken from Clement Greenberg's discussions of the development of twentieth-century painting and sculpture.

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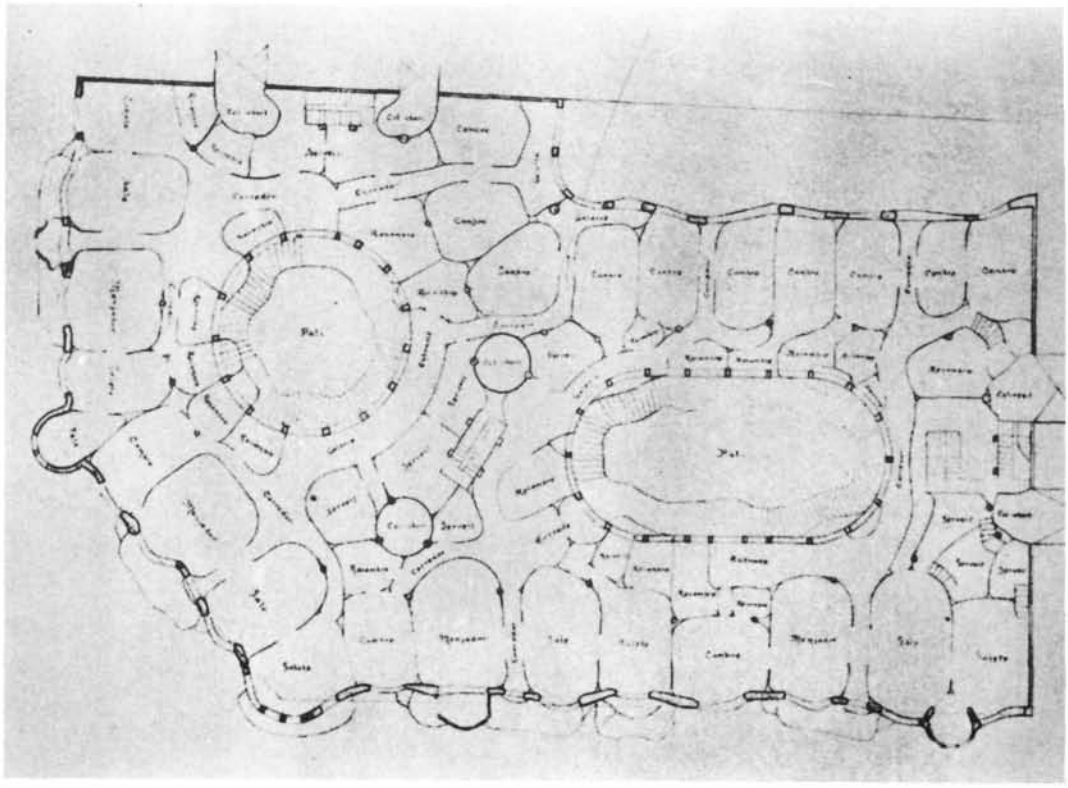
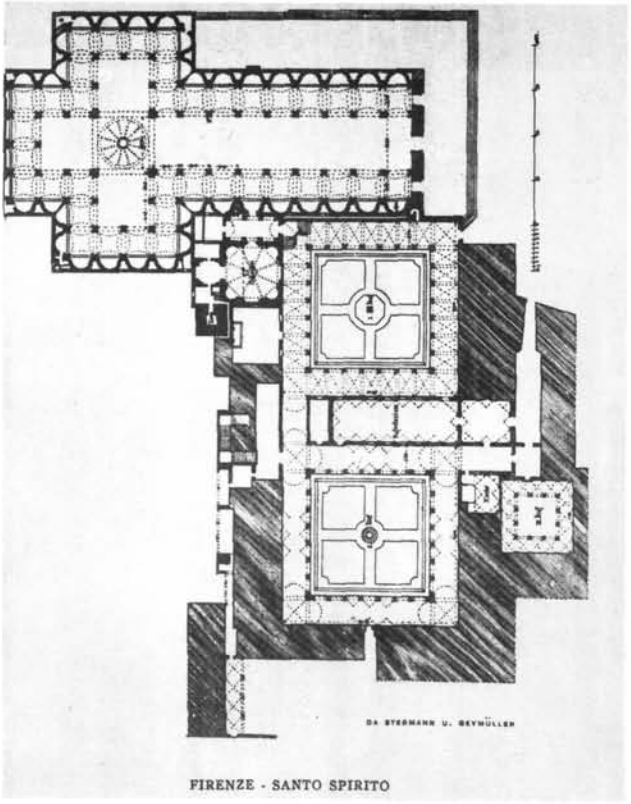


Antonio Gaudí
CASA MILÁ (original schematic floor plan)
(Courtesy George R. Collins, New York and Archivo Amigos de Gaudí, Barcelona)



Brunelleschi
SANTO SPIRITO (plan of the church)

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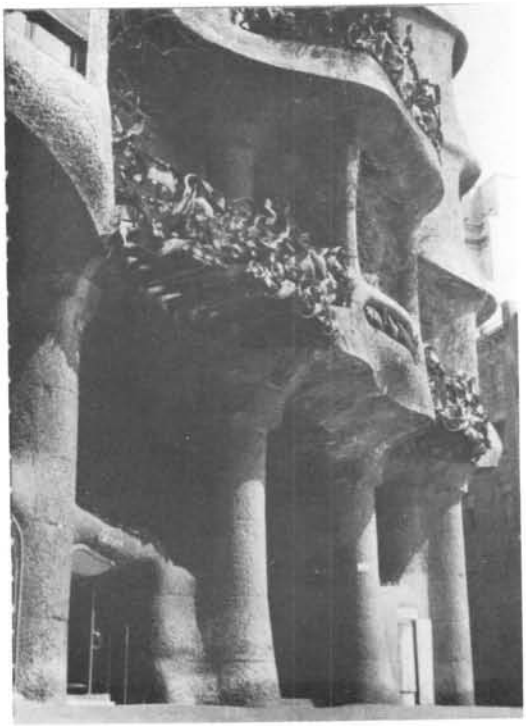

Antonio Gaudí
CASA MILÁ
(Courtesy Archivo Amigos de Gaudí, Barcelona; Foto Aleu)

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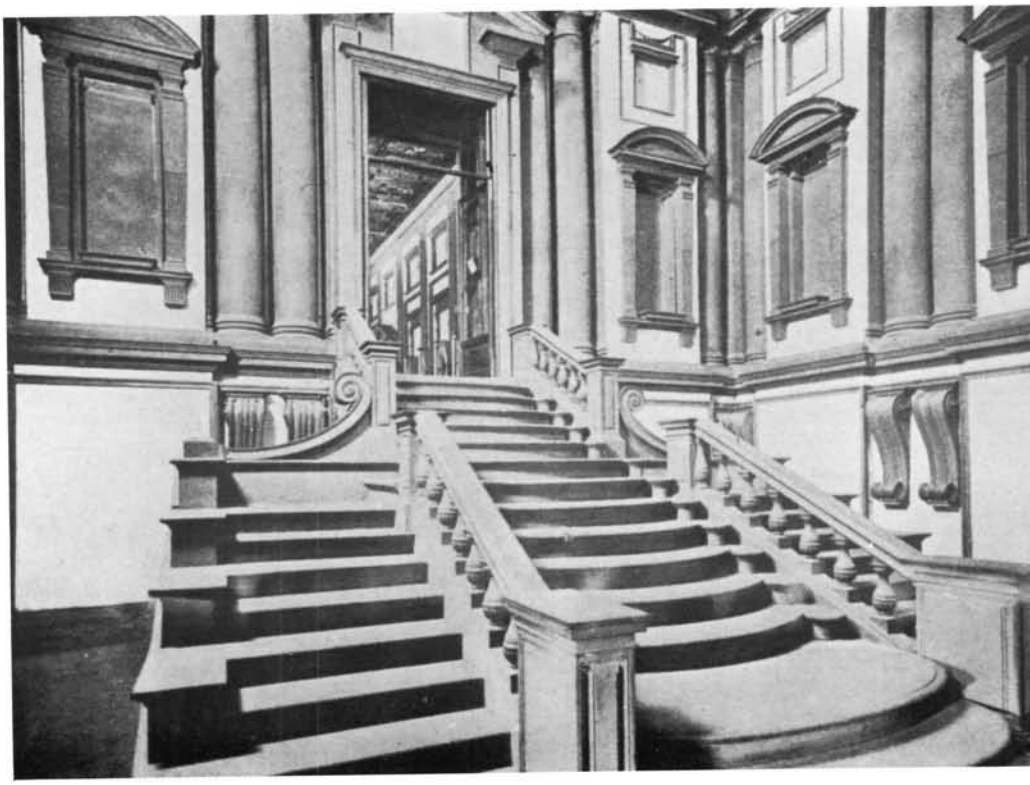

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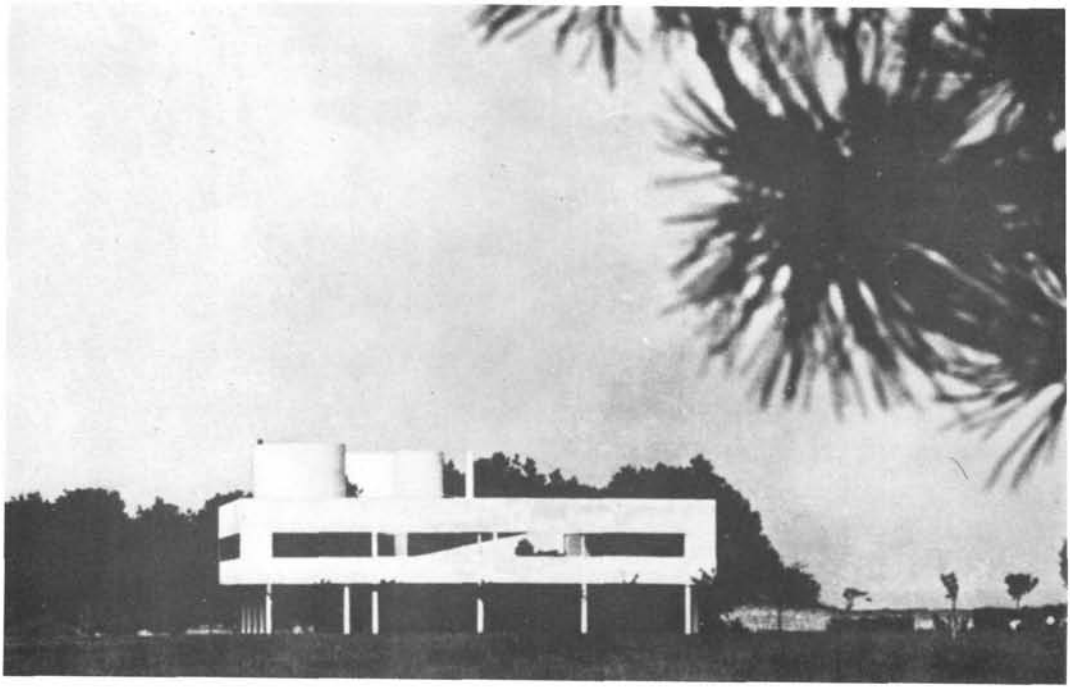

Le Corbusier
VILLA SAVOIE

Le Corbusier
CARPENTER CENTER
(Courtesy Harvard University News Office)

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Le Corbusier
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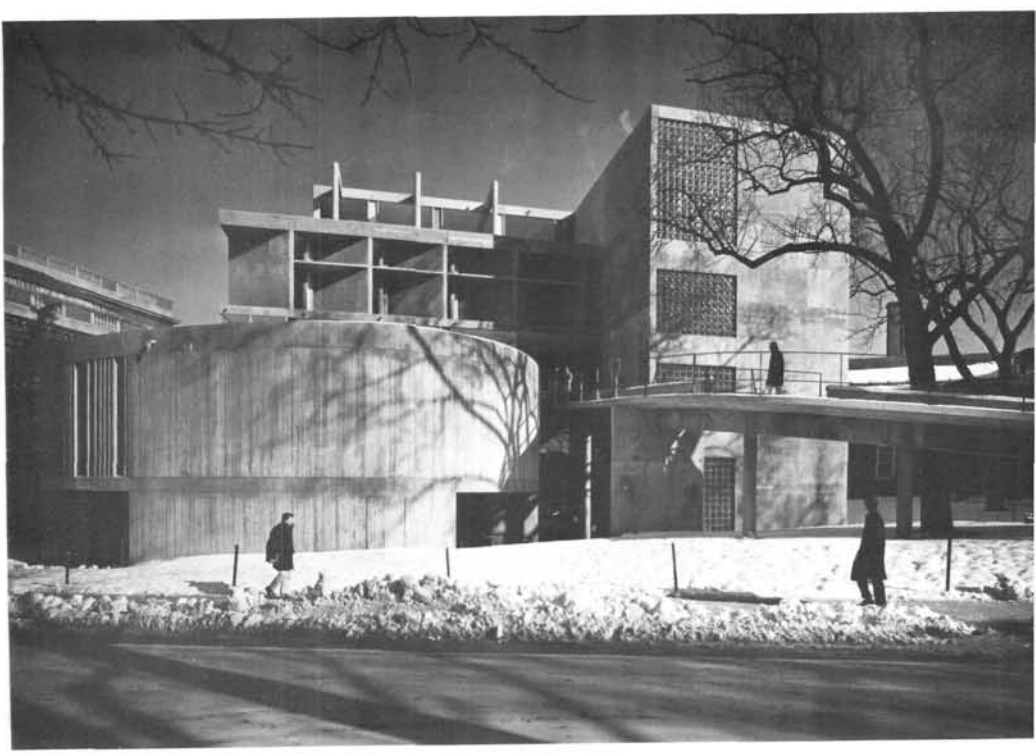

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Piano

Sonata in C Minor 1771 — *Haydn*

Allegro Moderato
Andante con moto
Allegro

Sonata, Opus 10, no. 3 — *Beethoven*

Presto
Large e mesto
Allegro
Allegro

Six Bagatelles, Opus 126 — *Beethoven*

1. Andante con moto
2. Allegro
3. Andante
4. Presto
5. Allegretto
6. Presto — Andante amabile e con moto

INTERMISSION

Sonata in B Flat Major, Opus posthumus — *Schubert*

Molto Moderato
Andante sostenuto
Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza
Allegro, ma non troppo

Landler, from Opus 171 — *Schubert*

Mead Auditorium — October 1, 1966 — 8:15 P.M.

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Sonata in C Minor 1771

The author of a short article on Haydn printed in 1766 called the master's music "charming, ingratiating, engaging, naturally humorous and enticing." If the man who write these words had read them again a few years later, he would have found them surprisingly inadequate, for by then Haydn's music had lost most of the characteristics he had mentioned. The composer had grown tired of the charm and gracefulness of rococo music, so dear to him in his earlier days. To express personal feelings and strong emotion now seemed one of the main aims of Haydn's art. . . .

The pianoforte sonata of 1771 shows Haydn in the midst of his "romantic crisis." In this composition, the master's only piano sonata in C minor, all the formal restraints of the *style galant* are broken, and passion and subjective feeling triumph. The finale of the C minor sonata is no longer a carefree affair destined solely to dismiss the listener in a gay mood; it becomes the climax of the whole work and is imbued with dramatic tension.

Karl Geiringer: *Haydn*

Sonata, Opus 10, no. 3

In the D major Sonata, Op. 10, no. 3, Beethoven's power appears with an intensity which must have come more as a shock than as a revelation to his contemporaries. It is doubtful whether any part of it except the exquisite minuet can have been acceptable to orthodox musicians in 1798. The slow movement is not only Beethoven's first essay in tragedy, but is by far the most tragic piece of music that had even been written up to that time. In the recent, but now moribund, reaction against Romanticism, some of our cleverest writers achieve their best effects of unconscious comedy by casting doubts upon its sincerity. They should know better than to mistake for insincerity that early phase of technique in which the artist has recourse to carefully measured pauses that are dangerous rhetorical gestures, or stage effects. The occasion for such effects is adequate, and their danger is nothing compared with that of filling up their spaces with explanations. They are not so abnormal in opus 10, no. 3, as to destroy the continuity of the design; and still less do they overstrain the suggestive powers of the pianoforte and the listener's capacity to integrate slow broken rhythms.

Turn now to the rest of the Sonata, op. 10, no. 3. The opening of the first movement seems to spring out at us like a panther. . . . Beethoven, after a pause for breath if not for safety, answers his first four bars with six bars, in themselves an expansion, but cut off with a full close . . . [then] begins a counterstatement in which the panther springs just one step farther and knocks us into the middle of the next day. We might almost as well have said "next

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week," for the next key is the so-called 'relative minor,' and Beethoven needs a very long and flowing paragraph, passing through several keys, before he can arrive at his objective, the orthodox dominant; but this paragraph flows gloriously. Even apart from its context, it would be evidently the work of an artist with unlimited talent for composition, and in its context it justifies Beethoven for having begun his story with such alarming abruptness.

The Finale of the Sonata is in a peculiar case. We seem to have got over the anti-romantic reaction against Beethoven's slow movements, but fashionable criticism does not yet seem to have discovered Beethoven's sense of humour. I have already, almost unnecessarily, pointed out that critics are to be pitied, rather than reviled, for this omission, inasmuch as to describe Beethoven's humour adds to the horrors of all verbal description of music the hideous ineptitude of analyzing jokes. Fortunately, as has been often pointed out, there is nothing which we fear so intensely as the accusation of not seeing the humour of this or that; so I shall confidently assert that Beethoven is humorous wherever I think that he is, and the reader may doubt me at his peril. The final of opus 10, no. 3 is one of the funniest things Beethoven ever wrote, and differs from later and larger manifestation of his humour in the fact that it is not yet stated, like, for instance, the Finale of the Eighth Symphony, or an Olympian architectural scale.

Donald F. Tovey: *Beethoven*

Six Bagatelles, Opus 126

These small pieces were written at various times around about 1823, and completed that year, when Beethoven was finishing the ninth Symphony and the "Missa solemnis," so that we may regard them as relaxations from the two most exacting tasks he had ever undertaken. They are also contemporary with the "Diabelli" Variations. But although Beethoven did call them "Bagatelles," we need not suppose he regarded them as mere frivolities. . . . his last Bagatelles, small as they are, at once strike one as having absorbed his whole creative faculty. They are in their own way as original and representative as anything he wrote in the last three or four years of his life, and doubly precious because not quite like anything else.

Sonata in B Flat Major, opus posthumus

. . . When Schubert is at the height of his power in large forms we may know it by the returns to his main themes. Two great movements notorious for their redundancies and diffuseness are the first movement of the String Quartet

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in G major and the first movement of the Pianoforte Sonata in B flat, Schubert's last composition in this form. In both of them the whole interest converges upon the return to what is called the 'first subject,' involving the return to the main key after the wanderings of a long and dramatic development. The method of that return is entirely different in the two cases; both passages may rank with the most sublime inspirations of Beethoven. . . . In the B flat Sonata. . . the whole movement. . . runs a course not unusual in Schubert's large designs; opening with a sublime theme of the utmost calmness and breadth; descending, by means of a good though abrupt dramatic stroke, from the sublime to the picturesque, and then drifting from the picturesque through prettiness to a garrulous frivolity. But then comes meditation. The frivolous theme itself begins to gather energy in the course of the development. It originates a dramatic passage which begins picturesquely and rises from the picturesque to the sublime. When the calm has become ethereal a distant thunder is heard. That thunder had been twice heard during the opening of the movement. At present the key (D Minor) is not far from the tonic. The main theme appears softly at a high pitch, harmonized in this neighboring key. The distant thunder rolls again, and the harmony glides into the tonic. The theme now appears, still higher, in the tonic. An ordinary artist would use this as the real return and think himself clever. But Schubert's distant thunder rolls yet again, and the harmony relapses into D minor. The tonic will have no real weight at such a juncture until it has been adequately prepared by its dominant. The theme is resumed in D minor; the harmony takes the necessary direction, and expectancy is now aroused and kept duly excited, for a return to the first subject in full.

Tovey: "Franz Schubert"

. . . Schubert's tonality is as wonderful as star clusters, and a verbal description of it is as dull as a volume of astronomical tables. But I have often been grateful to a dull description that faithfully guides me to the places where great artistic experiences await me; and with this hope I leave the reader poised on Schubert's dominant of B flat.

Tovey: "Tonality in Schubert"

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cation of architectural volume is that the solid one sees—a wall, for instance—is a thin hollow element (there need be no implication of insubstantiality in such an appearance). Walls become, in Frank Lloyd Wright's formulation, bent planes, rather than parts of a massive solid. This change from masses to volumes as units of architectural creation is not, of course, a change of substance, it is a change of appearance. Buildings have always been hollow, but never before has the interior void been recognized so completely on the exterior, been allowed, indeed, to shape the exterior. The change is thoroughly analogous, as Summerson and Giedion have pointed out, to the change that has overtaken painting in the last century by which the painting is no longer a surface on which an illusion of something else is created, but asserts itself as the two-dimensional object it has, by definition, been. Modernist architecture has also simply replaced an appearance closer to reality for one dealing in illusion.

The interpenetration of spaces that is facilitated by an appearance of volume rather than of mass is invariably discussed in terms of the interpenetration of interior and exterior spaces, which is, indeed, the next step toward a truly modernist architectural space. But the final achievement of such a space depends on the elimination of interior-exterior space distinctions altogether. It is that final step—the recognition of unitary space—that is not often enough stressed. The replacement of mass by volume—the recognition of interior space on the exterior—and the interpenetration in three dimensions of interior and exterior space are merely preliminary to the crucial determinant in modernist space, the integration of interior and exterior space achieved by the manipulation of solids to bring about a continuous void. Stylistic considerations aside, such a continuous void has only become easily possible since the introduction of reinforced concrete which allows, in turn, continuous, free-form solids.

There is then, a definable modernist space which is the essential element in the complete reversal of traditional approaches to building. Instead of solids giving shape to voids, the space—the void, the thing enclosed—becomes the active element and determines the solids. That is, the location of the solids—the walls—are determined by the needs of the space. The analogy is with a gap across which a spark will jump when the terminals are at a crucial distance, or with modernist painting, in which relationships between forms are determined by purely visual considerations. Just so, when the solid elements of architecture are brought into certain relationships with one another the spaces become charged and alive—and the achievement of that life is the determining factor in the placing of the solids. Of course, an infinite number of practical considerations enter into and alter this formulation, but what distinguishes modernist architecture is the importance of space and the extent to which it is allowed to determine the form of the building. In looking at a building conceived with such

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space, volumes swell as if pushed out by the void they contain, and solid elements are seemingly held apart from one another by the intervening space. Furthermore, the building is no longer *in* space, but *of* it. Perhaps this is best grasped by comparison with a distinction hinted at by Summerson between Classical and Gothic architecture. Gothic attempts to dissolve structure into surrounding space—to accommodate it to that space. Crockets, finals, ridge combs, indeed, spires themselves, are such accommodations. Classical buildings, on the other hand, stand out sharply against the space in which they stand, making no accommodation to it. In the latter case, space becomes a background, and the building is distanced against it. In the former, space is an enveloping agent, and the building dissolves into it. In both cases, space is something apart from the fabric of the building, or is only important as interval—the negative distance between solids. In modernist architecture, however, space is of the very substance of the building itself. It penetrates and shapes the structure, and can be said to be neither behind nor around it, it is through and of it, undelimited and re-entrant. As Clement Greenberg has observed, "What has insinuated itself into modernist art is the . . . notion of space as a continuum which objects inflect but do not interrupt, and of objects as being constituted in turn by the inflection of space." Although space may, in the sense we have noted, determine structure, it is, of course, non-existent without the definition given it by that structure, and the marriage between the elements of modernist architecture becomes, then, infinitely closer than previously. In seeing a modernist building one has the feeling not so much that it was developed from a set of rules or that its relationships were predetermined by canon, as that it developed simultaneously at all points, as one often feels of a Cézanne as distinguished from, say, a Renaissance painting.

There are few precedents for modernist architectural space, and the most satisfactory, as with painting, are often Byzantine or late Renaissance. Hagia Sophia, with the undulations of its domes, its apses and exedrae, and the arcades through which the main space leaks into subsidiary areas, is perhaps an analogy. Closer to the effect of modernist space is Brunelleschi's Santo Spirito, with its continuous periphery of absidioles, as if the interor space were pressing against the walls, swelling them out in a series of regular scallops. The visual effect of Brunelleschi's curving side walls is to make the exact limits of the church indefinite, an effect enhanced vertically by the crossing dome. Thus, visually, the limits of the building's fabric become uncertain, and the importance of the space correspondingly greater, in a way not totally different from the side chapels of Corbusier's church at Ronchamp, with their curving walls and concealed overhead light sources. Even more relevant from the point of view of spatial ambiguity, however, is Michelangelo's Laurentian Library. The famous effect of being unable to determine the exact moment of transition

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from the vestibule to the Library itself is duplicated almost exactly in the ramp of Corbusier's Carpenter Center, on which it is impossible to determine at just what moment one is outside or inside the building. Furthermore, the aggressiveness of the architectural elements in Michelangelo's vestibule charges the space in such a way that one begins to feel it fighting back, as if it were a palpable presence, and one hears often of the feeling that the longitudinal space of the library is squeezed through the door, pouring in a river down the stairs of the vestibule, as if it were indeed an active, moving thing. It is these examples, in which spatial limits become indefinite, or in which the space itself seems to be active, that prefigure modernist space, and not, as is often claimed, the architecture of the high Rococo. Rococo, even at its most exuberant, as in Bavaria or the Piedmont, was essentially a decorative style grafted on to a thoroughly regular geometric substructure. The space was made to seem to flow by the addition of painting and sculpture and the use of quantities of natural daylight but in reality it was not space that moved but the decorative elements within it. As the plans of these buildings show, interior spaces were carefully related to one another, and interior was always totally distinct from exterior, although interior spaces might be expressed on the exterior. The spire of St. Ivo comes to fruition in the Guggenheim Museum, not in any work of Corbusier's.

Of immediate historical relevance to the development of modernist architectural space is the architecture of the Art Nouveau, for, although Art Nouveau was in itself essentially a decorative movement, it, and the various moralizing movements in the arts with which it was peripherally associated, made possible the breakthroughs to a new architectural vocabulary. All the architects most closely associated with spatial concerns—Wright, Horta, Gaudí, and Corbusier among them —sprang from it. When translated into three dimensions, the flowing curvilinear forms of Art Nouveau generated a flowing, and ultimately unitary, space. Furthermore, the late nineteenth-century interest in "honest" architecture—in natural materials naturally used and in irregular, picturesque and medieval forms—marked the end of interest in the façade and meant that plans and elements of the building (rooms, exterior masses) began to break away and be related to each other purely visually rather than symmetrically or canonically. The St. John of this movement—its *vox clamans in deserto*—and the present reigning father figure for architects, is Antonio Gaudí. An almost wholly autochthonous expression of the Catalan Art Nouveau, and inconceivable apart from the riches of that school, Gaudí nevertheless pushed unitary space further than any architect until Corbusier, whose first great experiments with space were made just about the time Gaudí died. Gaudí dissolved the rugged stone fabric of his buildings in such a way that the carved and curved surfaces made it almost impossible to tell where wall ended and opening began. In

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his interiors, Gaudí joined floor, walls, and ceilings in a continuous fabric, using entirely free forms for his rooms, and often producing effects like those of water-worn caverns. It is important to note that he never totally abandoned the idea of interior and exterior, nor did he do away entirely with windows as penetrations through walls, with vertical supports, or with many of the other standard elements of the architectural vocabulary, but in the folded and melting surfaces of such buildings as the Casa Milá and the one finished façade of the Sagrada Familia, he moved far toward total integration of building fabric and space by breaking down the barriers between them.

The architect whose work epitomizes modernist space, and, indeed, who first completely realized that space, is Le Corbusier. Springing from the Art Nouveau, Corbusier's development until the construction of the Villa Savoie around 1930 was entirely directed toward integration of the various elements of his buildings. Openings came more and more to be grouped together, becoming voids rather than openings, and solids also tended increasingly toward being defining volumes rather than walls or masses. The Villa Savoie summed up all that Corbusier had worked toward during his early years, and broke new ground on which the full realization of modernist space was to be built. After the Villa, shapes began to detach themselves in Corbusier's work, particularly on the roofs of his larger buildings, and rectilinearity was regularly broken in favor of irregular profiles. Curving surfaces also became important, and soon entire buildings were composed of shapes generated entirely by their respective functions and relationships to one another. Ronchamp is such a structure, and the Carpenter Center another. Indeed, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard can be said to epitomize not only Le Corbusier's work as a whole, but the entire conception of modernist space, and is quite possibly the greatest twentieth-century structure on this continent. It is a building with, in a very real sense, no front and back, no top and bottom, no inside and no outside. Nothing is more telling in this respect than the joke that circulated shortly after its completion, of Corbusier returning to see the structure after it had been built and exclaiming in horror, "My God, you've built it upside down!" A small building conceived on a large scale, the structure makes masterful use of an almost impossible site—a narrow plot of land between the massively scaled Fogg Museum and the modestly scaled Harvard Faculty Club. The Center acknowledges the presence of both by being placed obliquely on the site, turning away from the Faculty Club and toward the Fogg. Although there is no actual accommodation of scale, the Center does present a compact and bulky aspect to the Fogg, while the Faculty Club side angles away from the Club, and is partly raised on pilotis to mitigate the effect of its scale. The entire building is swept into a massive embrace with both its neighbors by the ramp that makes a broad S-curve from front to back, passing through the build-

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ing at the point of principal entrance. As with the Laurentian Library, the moment at which one has reached the top of the ramp, and is in a sense "in" the building, is also the moment at which he begins his decent out of the building. If, as has been often observed, Wright's plan are centrifugal, moving outward from a tight inner core, Corbusier's building at Harvard is thoroughly centripetal, returning ever on itself as one walks around it. It is a building the tempo of which varies constantly, and speaking of tempo or rhythm or the measured passing of time is not at all unsuitable for this building. The freely invented curves of the huge volumes that project back and front (back and front in relation to the streets) have a velocity of their own that varies constantly—a velocity that is underscored by the vertical rhythms of the form—marks in the concrete and the slender *brise-soleils* spaced at irregular intervals. Thus, the building seems to appear and disappear, to unfold itself at varying speeds, quite independently of the speed at which one walks around it. Furthermore, one is always being drawn visually in or definitely excluded by the sequence of openings and the placement of the larger *brise-soleils* at the rear. The inside-out quality of the building is emphasized by the fact that the number of openings visible at any one moment from "outside" the building are relatively few, while the entire vertical cut that allows passage of the ramp through the building is glazed on the "inside." The single feature of Carpenter at which one might cavil is the stairwell glazed with glass block. The block seems to be a stylistic hangover from the 1930's, and while it functions well enough to light the stairwell, it is infinitely less powerful in effect than the spaces it occupies were when unglazed. It now presents an equivocal front to the street—neither a solid wall nor an opening—and one can only wish it had been more conventionally glazed, retaining the blackness and depth of the original openings.

Finally, it is important to note that modernist architectural space has radically affected the way a building is experienced. It is no longer possible—or is not so in truly modernist buildings—simply to look *at* a building. One must now be engaged *with* it. A building such as the Carpenter Center is not graspable until one has had the experience of it—of being in and around it. There are no clues to what it is as a totality in any one view of it, and inferring the whole from its parts, as might be possible in a classical structure, is impossible. It is as though the elusiveness of works of art had finally found concrete expression. In the recent past it has become perhaps too possible to think one knows a work of art from reproduction, especially since reproductions have become so good and so numerous. Now, as if to preserve the elusiveness of the experience of the work itself, and to forestall the possibility of thinking one has "got it" from a photograph, we have architecture, and, indeed, painting and sculpture, that escapes completely the single eye of the camera.

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ANTHONY BURGESS

Letter from England

IT HAS BEEN, AND IS STILL BEING, one of those times. My wife is in hospital on a high and windy hill above Hastings (a hill from which the Anglo-Saxons could have freewheeled down on the Normans with decimating results if 1066 hadn't been predestined to be what is was), having lost several gallons of blood from a duodenal ulcer that, to use the fashionable pentagonologue, escalated. The hospital is staffed mostly by immigrants from the liberated British colonies, and these are refreshingly free from bedside syrup. They say, accusingly, "You have bled too much" or "You have damaged your liver." Well, who hasn't? I travel every afternoon from Etchingham (train and bus) and back again (bus and train) to see her. We both gain a perverse satisfaction from the knowledge that we are getting some return at last from our forced contributions to the National Health Service. That, I suppose, is the wrong attitude. I have been cooking for myself—rump steak; stews made from corned beef, potatoes and onions; welsh rarebits with poached eggs on; not enough green stuff. This is a great strawberry season, so I'm getting plenty of strawberries and double cream. The refrigerator is making more ice than I can use, so I start off my cooking evening with a beer glass crammed with cubes, lavish gin and scant tonic poured over, zest provided by canned grapefruit juice. I'm managing as well as can be expected. The trouble is that I've been trying to finish a novel.

This village is more primitive than my readers may be willing to believe. I live on the select side of the village street, and here we have cesspools. On the other side they have nothing. They defecate into buckets and bury the ordure in their gardens. This is very difficult in winter when the earth is frozen: one feels like asking Graham Greene to arrange for the dispatch of pneumatic drills. At last, though, after half a century of rural council dithering, the drains are coming through. At the bottom of my garden there are noisy engines with claws and teenage labourers with transistors. I have to do most of my writing at night, after three dexedrine tablets and another beer glass full of gin-sauced ice. The cats court in the garden and the dog grumbles in the cellar. I push on and have, in fact, at last pushed on to the final page. To bring a novel to an end is murderously difficult. What shall the last sentence be? Mine, addressing the poet-hero in Tangerine exile, is this: "You can, when depressed, pluck your own sweet bay or *laurus nobilis,* since nobody will pluck it for you: the aromatic leaves are useful in cookery, and you can cure your sick cat with the berries." I toss in my lonely bed, wondering whether that

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will do. Ah, the hell with it. I shall take the typescript to London tomorrow, stowing it in the out-of-sight-out-of-mind dustbin which is one's publisher.

The novel has, to tell the truth, been going on too long. I started it in the fall of 1965, but so many deadline assignments got in the way that I had to keep abandoning it. The first folio is almost yellow with age, and the four different typefaces are a record of the vicissitudes of nearly two working years—typewriters breaking down, new ones borrowed, abandonment of the decrepit, a new one bought: typewriters are, after all, very inexpensive commodities when you come to think of it. The real danger of spreading a shortish novel over a longish period is that the author changes between periods of resumed activity on it: he undergoes new influences, makes new resolutions. This is true even of so intensely unified a work as *Ulysses:* a naturalistic time-scale starts halfway through the book, so that the time for reading a chapter becomes identical with the time needed for the enactments within the chapter. In the first half you have to suppose a time as fluid or as editable as that in the Banquo-banquet scene in *Macbeth,* where dawn comes five minutes after dinner. The only way to write a novel —and this used to be my way—is to do nothing but write it, eight hours a day, seven days a week, so that no major distractions come between the first page and the last. I wonder now, with the way things are, how I shall cope with the next novel I intend to write. I have the name of the hero—Charles Levey Clegg—and I know that he is a composer whose professional career covers nearly seventy years, from *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* to the Beatles. Love, work, travel, crime—I envisage half-a-million words, all in the first person singular. And there will be faked photographs and musical analyses, complete with music-type illustrations. Britain's answer to *Jean-Christophe* and *Doctor Faustus.* Let me enjoy the dream before agonising over the actuality.

This delay in fulfilling large-scale fictional projects can be blamed not only on journalism (which is easier to do than writing novels) but on the growing demons of commitment. Authors are asked to take sides, bullied into crude declarations about the Vietnam war, South African *apartheid,* the "rebellion" in Rhodesia, the existence of God and so on. The letter to *The Times,* with its phalanx of writer-and-artist signatories, is becoming a bit of a bore. Writers should be the last people in the world to be asked for a brief unequivocal statement on anything: they spend their professional lives qualifying the simple, and their downright yes or no is usually a lie. Still, when a circular arrives in the post asking for a straight answer to some such question as "Do you believe in *apartheid?*" (the aim being, once more, to set marching a squad of signatories), you have to come out with your one-word answer. But sometimes the request is as unfair as the technique

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of cross-examination in the hands of an unscrupulous attorney. Recently there has been a good deal of acrimony in Britain about the discovery that the magazine *Encounter* has been financially supported by the CIA. Two editors resigned; the inevitable letters to *The Times* were prepared. I found it hard to sharpen my view of the matter into a declarative monosyllable. I've written a good deal for *Encounter;* I've been paid for what I've written; as I write nothing that can remotely be called partisan I cannot be said to be receiving money for helping the CIA. I accept the view that the dollars voted for a cultural organ were, because "culture" is a dirty word even among American politicians, enabled so to be voted by a sort of subterfuge. Dollars for *Encounter:* how far can one really say that an issue containing nothing but, let us suppose, a reappraisal of Hopkins' sprung rhythm, a review of a book on Confederate generalship, a discussion of Henry James's prose technique, a two-way wrangle about the Theatre of the Absurd, possesses any political significance?

I suppose one answer is that the mere fact of a cultural forum uninformed by ideology is a trumpet for democracy: see how free we are in the free world, able to make aesthetic pronouncements and keep politics out of them. By being non-political we are being most political. George Orwell's prophecy has, I suppose, come true: there is no human act these days that doesn't possess political overtones. By the same token, there has to be an implied insistance that the Other Side, the Ideological Enemy, do its propagandist job properly, otherwise we lose our own *raison d'être.* I should not be surprised if CIA money is finding its way into the Gosbank.

One cannot distinguish between clean and dirty money. Some of my fellow-writers are published in the USSR, and roubles await them should they ever feel like paying a visit to the Worker's Paradise. They have earned those roubles by allowing their books to serve as indictments of the Western Way of Life—Sillitoe's celebration of the inherited redness of British workers, long ground down by the cigarred top-hatted; Braine's study, in *Room at the Top,* of the capitalist corruption that can claim the most decent of proletarians; the young man's anger in Amis and Osborne. In the context of democratic dialectic, where protest is seen in its right proportions and can also be answered, such writing is healthy. Torn from that context, serving the end of the philosophy of the Soviets, it feeds an official dream. The writers can't be blamed. If their roubles enable them to buy caviar and vodka and trips to the Bolshoi Ballet, the roubles are clean enough. Reject the roubles, and some state department will gladly absorb them: the books will still be published. Church rents come from Paddington slums; a work of mine has been bought by a prostitute; a train robber may stock his library with first editions of Graham Greene. Money is money, totally untainted by ethics. "Keep your dirty money"—such nonsense. If the CIA feels like making me a secret

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donation, let it not hesitate one moment. And if anybody has any dollar bills stained by the blood of race-riots, I will gladly give them a transient home.

The enforcement of commitment, incidentally, showed up at its most ironical when the Arab-Israeli war began. I received a circular from Miss Edna O'Brien, the expatriate Irish novelist, with the salutation "Dear Friend" and an urgent request for the sum of twenty-five pounds to help pay for the insertion of a full-page advertisement in one of the popular dailies. This advertisement, signed by all available writers, artists and "intellectuals," was to call for help on behalf of Israel from the whole of the Judaeo-Christian world, since she was inevitably going to be liquidated by the armies of Islam. But by the time the advertisement was out, Israel had already chewed up her enemies. It is perhaps fanciful to suppose, but I will suppose it, that Israel had the support of great literature in her struggle. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand lose her cunning, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I remember not Jerusalem above my chief joy." With a text like that as a banner, how was it possible to lose? (And, for that matter, how will it be possible to restore the divisive Mandelbaum Gate?) All the Koran can give the Arabs is (Surah II, verse 191): "And fight not them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you there then slay them. Such is the reward of disbelievers." A certain want of inspiration, somehow.

Kingsley Amis, my friend and a superb novelist, has just done a painful and courageous thing. His first novel, *Lucky Jim*, came out thirteen years ago, and its anti-hero, Jim Dixon, provided a voice for many of the disaffected young—the radicals sick of the rule of old fogies, the good-hearted but not very thoughtful exponents of a new and vital British socialism. Amis himself has always seemed to embody in his attitude to the Establishment the best qualities of traditional radicalism—no damned nonsense about privilege; get this grouse-shooting lot out. Well, the grouse-shooters have been out for some time now, and we are up to our waists in Wilsonian pragmatism, whatever that is. Amis has publicly declared against Labour. He has not gone over to the Tories, who remain pretty bad, but he has no more faith in the utopiographers, the people who will change mankind by changing the system. Socialism does not work.

Smugly, I can attest that never in my youngest and fieriest days did I hope anything from socialism. In 1945 I voted Labour, because it seemed that Winston Churchill wanted to keep us in the army forever, and I'd already had six frustrating military years; Labour said that they would have us all in utility-pattern demobilisation suits before you could say Keir Hardie (they didn't fulfil that promise, but how were we to know?). But I never voted Labour again, and never

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will. It's nothing to do with the defence of capitalist privilege: when I was a wretchedly poor high school teacher, with nothing to gain from the Right, I was on the local Conservative Committee, chaired by a detestable, stupid, autocratic ex-colonel (he once observed to me, of our member of parliament, "Nice chap, but a bit serious-minded"). My aim was to help get the Labour Government out; when we'd got them out, I at once resigned from the Tory Party. My political views are mainly negative: I lean towards anarchy; I hate the State. I loathe and abominate that costly, crass, intolerant, inefficient, eventually tyrannical machine which seeks more and more to supplant the individual. The more State we have, the more wretched we become.

A political party dedicated to the aggrandisement of the State must kill dissent among its own members: freedom of conscience is an individual value and, in a collective metaphysic, must be bulldozed out of existence. This means that there is just no hope of effective opposition when a Socialist government is backed by a comfortable majority. Whatever the proposal, it has to go through. The whole nation is against the decimalisation of the coinage, the nationalisation of steel, the building of a new airport at Stansted, but the voice of the nation cannot hope to prevail. I do not see how this differs greatly from fascism. There is little to prevent a voting through of the "temporary" suspension of the Constitution, and we may get this yet. Indeed, we face a time when there will be little to choose between the two main parties. The Socialists erect a great State tumulus, and it remains when they go out of office. They nationalised the railways and committed the Tories to making that nationalisation work. They will nationalise steel, and the Tories will grow weary of denationalising it. Our future pattern, for ever and ever, is one of State domination.

Dear, dear, that is no note to end on. But a summer's day like this English Sunday in Sussex, the clay turned up at the bottom of the garden, the yellow digging machine at rest, the green too green to be true, the birds frantic with cantilenas, the sun genuinely hot, cannot softsoap me into ignoring my own disquiet. Thank God, there are plenty of voices to protest against State high-handedness and what smells sometimes like injustice, but the subtlety of our collectivist regime lies in its total permissiveness of protest. We can say precisely what we like, even if we cannot see what films we want to see. But, Harold Wilson, we rant and rant: thou smilest and art still, outtopping knowledge. Thou smokest thy pipe and art seen in thy galluses, just like the dictatorial president of *It Can't Happen Here.* Thou art the most trustworthy-seeming of gubernatorial images. But I would not trust thee from here to that flaming gatepost.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN WONDERFUL TO SEE on the stage the great things American Ballet Theatre and the Royal Ballet did last spring in Clive Barnes's reviews in *The Times*. Ballet Theatre's new *Swan Lake* was one. This was the complete four-act ballet, with the original Petipa and Ivanov choreography that Nicholas Sergeyev, a former *régisseur* at the Maryinsky Theater, reconstituted in 1934 for what was then the Vic-Wells Ballet, later became the Sadlers Wells, and now is the Royal Ballet, which has itself replaced the Sergeyev with the revised version of Robert Helpmann. The Sergeyev original was reproduced for Ballet Theatre—with a few revisions and additions—by the Royal Ballet's David Blair; and in Mr. Barnes's review this production now offered "the best version of the ballet anywhere to be found," and gave the company an additional role and purpose—of "bringing the best out of the past into American ballet." It was the best by virtue of Blair's staging, which gave it "its individual flair and special quality," and Oliver Smith's scenery and Freddy Wittop's costumes, which made it "a most properly sumptuous production." True, while it was the best staged in the world, it was not the best danced: the company hadn't performed it the 72 years the Kirov Ballet had had *Swan Lake* in its repertory, or even the 33 years the Royal Ballet had been dancing it; therefore it was "as much a promise as an achievement." But "the promise is bright." For though "the depths of the role [Odette-Odile] eluded her," Toni Lander "danced exceptionally well" in a portrayal that "was always stylish and clean"; Bruce Marks's "natural nobility [made] a strong impression as a slightly haughty and headstrong Prince," and "his dancing combined elegance with bravura"; and "the company as a whole has not looked in such good condition for many seasons."

I would have liked to see all this instead of what was done on the stage of the New York State Theater. The Sergeyev *Swan Lake* was what I saw the Sadlers Wells Ballet perform here in 1949; but I didn't recognize it in what Ballet Theatre did now. For one thing, the Sadlers Wells production did have sumptuous scenery in a style resembling that of the 19th-century Russian original; whereas the backdrop of Ballet Theatre's Act 1 had what looked like an Osbert Lancaster spoof of Ludwig of Bavaria's Neuschwanstein; and the great hall of the palace in Act 3 looked like a big public room in a Broadway hotel. And in the Sadlers Wells performance the choreography was executed by the incandescent Margot Fonteyn and an impressive partner, by accomplished lesser soloists, and by an excellently trained and precise corps; whereas in the Ballet Theatre performance Toni Lander achieved what looked like a Beatrice Lillie spoof of the role, in which

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every swan-like quiver of arm and hand—and in fact every movement of whatever part of the body—was comic in effect; Bruce Marks danced well, but had no princely force of presence to go with his prince's costume; in the first-act *pas de trois* the fast turns were done at half-speed, and even then were too much for one of the girls, who had to be turned by the boy to the end of the turn she couldn't complete; and there was as little brilliance in the operation of the corps. In all, a dismal performance, with which *not* to introduce this great classic of the past to the American public. As I said last year when Ballet Theatre presented Act 2 as the first instalment of this new *Swan Lake:* the company no longer has dancers of the magnitude of technique and style required to give this work its effect; and that means it isn't equipped for the great new role Mr. Barnes assigned to it.

Again, in the first scene of *Harbinger,* the new ballet by Eliot Feld, I saw a fresh dance vocabulary used unpredictably and effectively in the fast tempo of the second movement of Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 5; but the attempt to achieve such individual and effective invention in the slow tempo of the second scene was unsuccessful; and I remember only partial success in the remaining scenes. Even with these weaker scenes it was an impressive first work of a talented man; but it wasn't the *Harbinger* that was done in Mr. Barnes's review. In classic ballet, he said, this century had produced a few true originals—the last, perhaps, being Kenneth MacMillan, who in 1955 suddenly "exploded upon an unexpectant world. The explosion is all important. Choreographers are seldom born—they explode. One exploded last night. His name is Eliot Feld." And the audience, which seemingly always knows, had instantly known his *Harbinger* "for what it was—a new phase in American dance." The dancers too "knew what was happening—and danced accordingly. They went through the sweeps and flurls of Mr. Feld's fascinatingly original choreography as if it were a brave new world. I think it may well prove to be just that." The dancers also danced very well in the piece I saw; but I wish I had seen the one they danced in Mr. Barnes's review.

I wish too I had seen all the fascinating ballets of Kenneth MacMillan that Mr. Barnes has written about instead of the boring ones presented in the theater. The great original in classic ballet of this century, George Balanchine, once said he had begun to do choreography "because I wanted to move people around"; and if one defines the choreographer's gift in terms of his statement, it is the ability to move dancers around in ways that are fascinating and exciting to see. This is the gift Balanchine clearly has, but MacMillan has never exhibited in the ballets I have seen. It was therefore an agreeable surprise to get, in the new *Concerto* presented by Ballet Theatre, a manifestation of such skill in the moderately interesting movements MacMillan devised to go with the lively first movement of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2. But with the slow movement there were again only the usual strained-for ingenuities without visual interest; and in the

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finale the ingenuity achieved only bits of cuteness. And so I must again regret not having seen the *Concerto* Mr. Barnes wrote about, in which, throughout, there was the dancers' "playing an attractive and tender game with the music," and MacMillan's utilizing "space with unobtrusive craftsmanship and a constant eye-engaging contrast between diagonals and parallels of movement." But I can report that the dancers danced well in the piece I saw.

Ballet Theatre's revivals included Antony Tudor's *Undertow* and *Dark Elegies;* and feeling sure I would see not the masterpieces in Mr. Barnes's review but only the works I had seen twenty years ago and had stayed away from thereafter, I stayed away again. But Copland's score induced me to see Agnes de Mille's *Rodeo*—the one Mr. Barnes characterized correctly as "show-biz treacle," not the other one he described as de Mille's "best ballet, engagingly simple, winningly unpretentious." It was danced adequately, if not as well as I could remember: at the point in the second scene where the Champion Roper swings himself sideways into the air, alternately to the right and left, I recalled Frederic Franklin's extraordinary feat of giving the movements the appearance of effortless casualness, as against the impressively effortful accomplishment of something obviously very difficult that brought Edward Verso a storm of applause.

As for other older works, Robbins' *Les Noces* was again superbly done; and the company that had looked painfully incompetent in *Swan Lake* gave a brilliant performance of Lander's *Etudes* with Eleanor d'Antuono, Scott Douglas and Gayle Young in the leading roles, and a fine one of Fokine's *Les Sylphides,* with Ruth Ann Koesun outstanding in the Prelude and the *Pas de Deux.* But though the corps danced well in Balanchine's *Theme and Variations,* and Ted Kivitt executed his solos impressively, d'Antuono didn't have the elegance and style her role requires. I must mention that the dancers in *Theme and Variations* were visibly handicapped a number of times by Jean-Pierre Marty's inept conducting. And having mentioned this, I will add that I can't recall hearing a performance of *Swan Lake* as badly paced and phrased as the one conducted by Milton Rosenstock.

That leaves what—though I speak of them last, as something outside of the company's own operation—were the most distinguished artistic happenings of Ballet Theatre's season: the guest appearances of Erik Bruhn. He brought with him young Carla Fracci of La Scala, with whom he danced first in a *Romeo and Juliet pas de deux* he had devised to music from the Prokofiev score, which served its purpose of exhibiting Bruhn mostly in impassioned rushes, but also in a few leaps and spins, breathtaking merely as physical movements, and ennobled by his unique elegance; and Fracci in supported turns and lifts in which—in part, perhaps, because of her tight hairdo and unbecoming gown—she didn't operate with comparable impressiveness. But *Giselle* provided her with the conditions and opportunities for a performance that was technically brilliant, plastically beautiful and

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expressively moving. As for Bruhn, his Albrecht overwhelmed one again with the brilliance and beauty of movement achieved with elegance of style that was overwhelming in the performances with Markova years ago; and whereas then it was the abundant power of youth that inevitably caused him to overshadow a Markova operating, however marvelously, with lessened reserves of strength, now it was the authority acquired in the years since then that caused him to overshadow young Fracci.

Probably I was seeing the Ballet Theatre *Giselle* for the first time since the performances of Markova and Bruhn; and I found the Berman scenery—even badly lighted—as distinguished as I had remembered it to be. Mr. Barnes, who finds Oliver Smith's crudely unimaginative Act 3 of *Swan Lake* "properly sumptuous," last year urged Ballet Theatre to throw out the Berman *Giselle* and reinstate the pre-1948 Lucinda Ballard version, and this year rejoiced over the announcement of a new production next season that would replace the "pitiable" Berman scenery and costumes. In addition he used the occasion to say he *had,* in 1946, seen the Ballard *Giselle,* which I had said he could hardly have seen; but what is important is the perception and taste Mr. Barnes exhibited about what he saw; and if he didn't, as I thought, merely assume the Ballard *Giselle* must have been better than the Berman, but judged it to be better after seeing both, it means he looked at the Ballard with as little perception and taste as at the Berman.

As for the Royal Ballet, one of the things I would have liked to see was the MacMillan *Song of the Earth* about which Mr. Barnes wrote that MacMillan, "in what must surely be regarded as his best work to date, has been incredibly successful in catching the special mood of Mahler's farewell to earthly pleasures." For the piece I saw was an interminable succession of the usual MacMillan strained-for ingenuities without any visual interest in themselves and any relevance to the expressive connotations of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde.* And I would also have liked to see the *Shadowplay* of Antony Tudor that justified for Mr. Barnes the ballet's triumph in London: the "strange and engrossing work" with "the look and feel of a major work," whose choreography concerned with "the realms of experience and the attainment of grace" was "beautifully apt and untroubledly imaginative." For the piece I saw was a by no means engrossing realization of the ballet's idea in terms suggested by the Kipling *Jungle Book* that had inspired the Koechlin music—with the boy's progress to grace a passing through experiences with monkey-like Arboreals, a formidable male-seducer-like Terrestrial, a seductress-like Celestial.

The Frederic Ashton *Monotones* I saw seemed, for once, to be much the same as the piece done in Mr. Barnes's review: two *pas de trois,* as slight as the *Trois Gnossiennes* and *Trois Gymnopédies* of Satie to which they were danced, but more interesting to the eye than *Daphnis and Chloë* and Ashton's other recent large-scale works. And

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what turned out to be another exception to those boring works—one that was made engaging by the humorous touches of the mind that produced Ashton's early comic masterpieces, *Façade* and *Wedding Bouquet*—was his *Midsummer Night's Dream* ballet, *The Dream,* which I hadn't seen during the company's previous visit. It made points—for example, with the solo of Bottom—which Balanchine in his version does not make, but did not make some which Balanchine does, notably with the solos and *pas de deux* of the lovers; and it achieved nothing like the moments of imaginative power and grandeur which make Balanchine's version the work of major stature that Ashton's is not. One other important difference must be noted: Ashton's cutting some of Mendelssohn's music into snippets that he repeated at intervals as *Leitmotiven,* as against Balanchine's skillful fitting of the profusion of choreographed action into the successive pieces of music in their entirety. And so it must again have been a different Ashton *Dream* than I saw that led Mr. Barnes—when comparing it with Balanchine's version—to see them demonstrating in "two of the greatest choreographers of our time" similarities not only in "their understanding of the choreographic idiom, their genius in giving almost every choreographic phrase an individual trademark," but in "their musicality."

I seem to have seen the same *Brandenburg Nos. 2 & 4* of John Cranko as the one Mr. Barnes characterized as a disaster. And the *Paradise Lost* of Roland Petit that struck him as thin and trivial probably was the one that struck me as *kitsch.* Mr. Barnes thought it showed Petit to be a master of the theater, but less of a master of choreography; but I found it to be *kitsch* contrived with a choreographer's gift for visually arresting movement. Every bizarre or distorted movement of the Man, every acrobatic involvement of the Man and the Woman—unlike the elaborate ingenuities of MacMillan and Cranko—was something striking to the eye, which employed the capacities of Nureyev and Fonteyn with impressive effect.

Those extraordinary capacities were better employed in *Swan Lake* —the new Helpmann revision, which may be less good than the original presented by Ballet Theater, but was made to look better by being danced better. Actually the anonymously choreographed meditative solo of the Prince added at the end of Act 1 is something beautifully imagined; and as executed by Nureyev with his tremendous contained power it provides one of the production's great moments. It did so again this time; but it was overshadowed by the great moments Fonteyn created with the bodily configurations in motion and pose whose beauty and perfection were achieved with an elegance —in the sense not only of grace but of economy—that caused "its effect upon the mind," as W. J. Turner said of a Mozart piece, to be "out of all proportion to its impingement on the senses." Nor was it only these two great dancers but the other soloists and the corps who were equal to what the work asked of them.

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Fonteyn was not seen this time in what for me was her greatest performance—her Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*. Of those who took over the role, I saw Antoinette Sibley, who had been outstanding among the dancers of the first-act *pas de quatre* in *Swan Lake* two years earlier, and who now achieved a secure and beautiful performance of Aurora. She was also a lovely Titania in *The Dream,* in which the company's most impressive young male dancer, Anthony Dowell, was Oberon. Another excellent young dancer, Donald MacLeary, was the Prince Florimund in *The Sleeping Beauty;* and Michael Coleman's exciting elevation made him a brilliant Blue Bird in his *pas de deux* with the charming Jennifer Penney.

I have left to the last the other great event for me—besides the Fonteyn-Nureyev performance of *Swan Lake*—in the Royal Ballet's season: the Bronislava Nijinska *Les Noces,* first produced by Diaghilev in 1923, performed here by the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo in 1937 or 38, and now revived for the Royal Ballet by Nijinska herself, with scenery and costumes after the original designs of Natalia Goncharova. I had wondered whether it would seem different after thirty years; but it proved to be as singular, powerful and moving now as in 1937. Nijinska produced nothing comparable in the ballets I saw after that; indeed it was hard to believe these diffuse and feeble works had come from the mind that had achieved *Les Noces.* And seeing it now made it clear that Jerome Robbins hadn't produced its equal either. A basic difference was that Nijinska elaborated her ritualistic perpetuum mobile out of recognizably Russian peasant movements, whereas he used his own vocabulary—the one he had used in the large-group orchestrations of *The Age of Anxiety* and *West Side Story,* among others—with only occasional suggestions of Russian movements. This gave her piece authenticity and purity, as against the aura of Broadway around his version. And as the authenticity and purity were heightened by the context of nothing but the austere Goncharova scenery, so the Broadway aura was heightened by the context of the modern grand pianos and percussion instruments with their performers in modern evening clothes, the chorus and the conductor at the back of the stage—this in accordance with Stravinsky's own original wish, but—it was now clear —a mistake.

Of the New York City Ballet's performances of Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* I saw one with the familiar excellences of Villella's Oberon, Farrell's Titania, Mimi Paul's Helena, McBride's Hermia, and Verdy's performance in the second-act divertissement; and with a few new features—chiefly Deni Lamont's Puck, which was very good, and a new wig of golden curls for Villella's Oberon, which was quite bad.

The film of the ballet that was shown once for the benefit of the New York City Ballet Fund was interesting in having provided Balanchine with the space in which to realize the scheme of Act 2 that he had been unable to realize in the theater. The act took place in an outdoor

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courtyard from which stairs ascended toward the back; and after their festive opening dance Theseus and his court withdrew to the sides and back, from where they watched the divertissement of the dancers. Also, the camera had made possible a few magical effects in Act 1 that are impossible on the stage. But to the degree that the dances were changed in deference to the conventions of the film, they suffered losses. Oberon's dance with the Fairies to Mendelssohn's Scherzo, for example, chopped into sequences that were seen now from one angle and now from another, lost the effect it has seen as a single progression in a fixed framed space in front of the spectator. Nor did it seem to me that the ballet gained anything with the enormous close-up views of faces that the camera made possible. Placing a camera in front of the stage and just photographing a stage performance wouldn't have produced a work of film art; but it would have produced a facsimile of the ballet valuable for people today and a hundred years from today unable to see it on the stage.

Concerning the concert I heard by the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra under Haitink in Carnegie Hall's International Festival series, I can report fine playing in well-paced performances of Haydn's Symphony No. 96 and Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements.

Describing last summer's Prades Festival, the pianist Horszowski spoke enthusiastically about the performances of Haydn trios in which Rudolf Serkin had played the piano, and urged me to hear them at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in May. I missed the first two programs, at which I was told Serkin had played very well; but I heard the third, in which he played with the violinist Alexander Schneider and the cellist Leslie Parnas in the Trios Nos. 11, 12 and 28, and with the flautist Paula Sylvester and Parnas in the Trio No. 15. And I regret having to report that his playing was, as before in my experience, violent and insensitive in its treatment of the piano and the music, and this time in addition inconsiderate of the playing of the others, who showed themselves to be superior to him as instrumentalists, musicians and participants in ensemble performance.

Opera continues to be written about in terms of ideas without regard for the facts that contradict them. The latest instance is the writing occasioned by the Hamburg State Opera's visit last June for a week of performances in the Lincoln Center Festival '67. The writing was concerned with the contrast between the opera presentations of a company like the Metropolitan which traffics in star singers—concerts in costume "with a bit of moving and posturing," in the words of Rolf Liebermann, director of the Hamburg Opera—and the presentations of a company like the Hamburg, which has no star singers but only the good singing actors who are required for the *realistisches Musiktheater* Liebermann believes in. An article by Paul Moor in the June issue of *High Fidelity* quoted this statement of Liebermann:

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> Any opera of any real artistic merit deals with human emotions and conflicts which the performers *must* transmit to the audience, just as in a play. In the theatrical form which the word "opera" has for generations meant to most people, the musical notes in the score have ruled supreme and the text has come off a very poor second best. . . . Opera, in this sense, belongs to the last century. Realistic musical theatre, with neither music nor text subordinated to the other but both integrated into a new form, belongs to the twentieth century.

And Moor mentioned another feature of this new form—that "the performance also must make dramatic and psychological sense in all details." This required rehearsal; and Moor wrote that Hamburg put into rehearsals the money other companies paid for star singers. Hence, in place of concerts in costume by assemblages of such stars, Hamburg could offer the integrated dramatic performances of a well-rehearsed permanent ensemble of singing actors. And concerning these, Liebermann said:

> Musical theatre has of necessity developed a new breed, the singing actor, as demanded by a new art form. One reason you won't find the biggest operatic names in our house is that we demand of our people things you can't ask from the biggest stars—for one very simple reason: they can't do them. Our people even *look* different.

I disagree with Liebermann's contention that the opera performances in which the musical notes counted for more than the words were performances which didn't transmit the human emotions and conflicts the opera dealt with. The point of opera, as against the spoken play, is that it makes its effect through the music, and requires, to make that effect, first that the music be expressively convincing, and second that it be effectively sung. If, then, those performances in which the music counted for more than the words were performances of operas with expressive music and with singers who sang it effectively, they transmitted the essential dramatic values. And actually all of us have been moved by just such performances—i.e. by the dramatic values transmitted almost entirely by the music and the singing.

This doesn't mean I don't care about the words being pronounced clearly, and the staging of the performance making dramatic sense. I do care about them; but here I dispute Liebermann's contention that these are new things in opera production that can be achieved only by a new kind of opera singer, the singing actor, and not by the old kind, the star singer. It is my impression that some of the star singers—Fremstad, Chaliapin, Leider, Lehmann, Pinza—were remarkable singing actors. And from what Jan Peerce told me about Toscanini's care and

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work to obtain correct and expressive pronunciation of the words, confirmed by my observation of his NBC rehearsals of operas; from the reports testifying to his concern with scenery and staging—from all this I would feel certain that Toscanini's performances with star singers at La Scala, the Metropolitan, Bayreuth and Salzburg were not mere concerts in costume "with a bit of moving and posturing." But having heard and seen some of these performances—the 1929 La Scala *Lucia* and *Falstaff,* the 1937 Salzburg *Falstaff, Fidelio, Magic Flute* and *Meistersinger,* I can say these were dramatically intergrated and effective performances by sufficiently rehearsed assemblages of singers, some of them stars, and some of them great singing actors; and I will risk the contention that the participation of Lehmann, Thorborg, Novotna, Roswaenge, Domgraf-Fassbender, Kipnis and the rest made them more effective, as *realistisches Musiktheater,* than what Hamburg achieves with its singing actors of less magnitude.

Nor were Toscanini's the only productions of that kind. Mahler's legendary productions in Vienna offered not only his distinguished performances of the music with great singers like Slezak and Kurz, but carefully planned and executed staging in which Mahler worked with designers and regisseurs of his choice. His disciple Bruno Walter achieved similar productions in Munich, the similar *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* and *Orfeo* I saw in Salzburg in 1937; Fritz Busch achieved them with Carl Ebert at Glyndebourne. Even at the Metropolitan Walter and Herbert Graf produced the *Figaro* of the early forties that was brilliantly sung and acted by Pinza, Brownlee, Steber, Sayao and Novotna; and there have been other productions there which have offered well-rehearsed assemblages of star singers in impressive musical and dramatic ensemble operations—e.g. the 1950 *Don Carlo,* the 1957 *Don Giovanni,* with its great Eugene Berman scenery and costumes, the first *Wozzeck* with Uhde—which I am, again, certain were more effective, as *realistisches Musiktheater,* than Hamburg's productions with its singing actors.

I have this certainty after hearing and seeing two of the Hamburg performances at Lincoln Center. Not of *Figaro* or *Don Giovanni* or *Don Carlo:* the company didn't bring any of its productions of basic repertory of the past. Its other talking point is that it fulfills its obligation to produce opera of the twentieth century, and carries this to the point of commissioning and producing works by composers of today. And it chose to stress this part of its operation during its week at Lincoln Center, offering only a concert performance of *Der Freischütz* and stage performances of Janáček's *Jenufa,* Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler,* Berg's *Lulu,* Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress,* and a work, *The Visitation,* commissioned from the American composer Gunther Schuller, which had had an enormous success at its premiere in Hamburg last October. Since I couldn't manage to attend all, I limited myself to *Lulu* and *The Visitation.*

The *Lulu* did offer a smooth-running ensemble operation by a

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well-rehearsed group—certainly a satisfying experience, but not one I had had to wait for the Hamburg Opera to give me. It was made more satisfying by the fact that the members of the group had not only good voices but the ability to sing the enormously difficult vocal parts in their difficult orchestral contexts—again not something offered for the first time. Nor was it given an exciting new dimension as *realistisches Musiktheater* by what the company claims as its innovations: the words were not always audible through the orchestra, as they are not in opera performances everywhere; the acting was not a new kind by a new breed of singing actor, but for the most part the usual acting of opera singers, directed by Günther Rennert as poorly for the work's purposes as singers at the Metropolitan have been, by him among others. Two exceptional achievements—through costume, make-up and acting ability—were the ebullient Rodrigo of Gerd Feldhoff in the Prologue, and the shifty old Schigolch of Kim Borg. But instead of the *"Ungeheuer"* the work calls for, Anneliese Rothenberger's Lulu was a pretty, capricious, immoral soubrette who now and then indulged in a tantrum; and Erwin Wohlfahrt's Painter and Gerhard Unger's Alwa, the writer son of Dr. Schön, were more like prosperous businessmen. Moreover, the needs of the work were subordinated to the idea that Rennert and the designer, Teo Otto, considered more important—the idea of the performance taking place in a circus arena before the circus audience. One saw, then, throughout the performance, beyond circus ropes and bars in the background, a backdrop with the circus audience that observed the happenings in the foreground on a permanent set on which changes of scene were effected by changes in a few pieces of furniture and props. As John Simon remarked, these changes didn't adequately convey Lulu's rise to luxury; but in addition the unenclosed unit set created difficulties with entrances and exists that were distracting and destructive to illusion. And worse still was the lowering of a movie screen—between the second act and what was presented of the uncompleted third act—and the projection on it of slides which told in words and drawings what happened to Lulu after the second act—certainly something that had never been done before in an opera production, but as certainly something not to do, and not to be expected in a production offered as *realistisches Musiktheater.*

As for *Lulu* itself, listening to it on records years ago I found that the music did not, for me, work effectively with the text as the music of *Wozzeck* had done. And now I found that it didn't work for me even with the text realized on the stage, as the music of *Wozzeck* had done. The reasons for this that occur to me begin with the difference between the texts: the words of *Wozzeck,* the predicaments of its characters, are themselves powerfully moving; the distorted vocal declamation heightens the effect of the words; the discordant orchestral writing provides a nightmarish context for the vocal declamation. On the other hand the situations and words of *Lulu* leave me uninvolved;

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and Berg carries the method of *Wozzeck* to extremes in which the exacerbated vocal writing has no relevance at all to the words, and the orchestral luxuriance no relevance to the vocal writing. To my ear, then—and as always I speak of what my ear heard, not of what my eye might see on the printed page—*Lulu* is not the masterpiece that others accept it as being.

However, even in this failure one hears the operation of the real and impressive powers that operate successfully in *Wozzeck*. But to my ear no such powers are involved in *The Visitation*—only, rather, the facility with notes which produced the endless screaming and orchestral hideousness that are like a caricature of the writing in *Lulu,* and have no expressive relation to Schuller's text. This is concerned with a Negro in the situation of K. in Kafka's *The Trial*; but it begins with an impossibility—a rooming house run by a white landlady in a southern town, in which a Negro has a room across the hall from a white woman; and its continuation reveals no Kafka-like writing powers. The work deserved the booing it got at the first Lincoln Center performance, not the cheers it got at the repetition I attended.

ERLING ENG

Beyond Psychiatry?

In recent years an increasing number of publications have been devoted to the relationships between individual disorders and structures of social power and communication. The family studies of Laing and Esterson in England, and Bateson and others in America, are well known. Some five years ago *The Schizophrenia of the Individual and the Collective* by the Finnish psychiatrist Siirala appeared in German about the same time as the publication in French of the psychiatrist Joseph Gabel's *The False Consciousness* and Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*.[1] The tendency of these works converged with the views of writers like Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown and Bruno Bettelheim in America. Generally they all pointed to the implicit madness of a great deal of what is accepted as sane in everyday life. They also suggested that the exclusion in one or another way of different kinds of persons from social participation serves to maintain an appearance of reasonableness of those in power, who in fact fear and distrust the new possibilities for human life and community.

[1] Foucault has been translated; Siirala and Gabel have not.

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For a long time America has stood in the eyes of the world for the hope of a liberated society, despite the criticism of the envious and disappointed. But with Hiroshima, Vietnam, and Negro rioting, a strong current of disillusion, justified or not, has set in. It is against this background that the preoccupation with America on the part of those presently engaged in "the revolt against insane reasonableness," as Marcuse recently put it, can best be understood.

It may also help to account for the heavy American participation in the recent Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation held in London during the last two weeks of July. Eight of the ten principal speakers were American, while the floor was dominated by American students who seemed to form more than half of the audience. Full Congress participants may have numbered about two hundred, while public audiences for speakers like Stokely Carmichael, Herbert Marcuse, and Paul Goodman probably approached the thousand mark.

The meetings of the Congress were held at the Roundhouse in Hampstead. This is a monstrous hive-shaped relic of Victorian industrial England, crowned from within by willowy sprays of black ironwork, supporting a begrimed glass-panelled dome through which a bleak light filtered down into the intellectual festivities below. The Congress was held under the auspices of the Institute for Phenomenological Studies and organized by the London psychiatrists Ronald Laing and David Cooper.[2] Founded about seven years ago, this was the Institute's first public meeting. Laing is well-known for his writings: *The Divided Self, The Self and Others,* and most recently, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.* David Cooper has written *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry,* which appeared earlier this year, in which he described his "Villa 21" therapeutic community project.

At the opening Saturday Cooper referred to "the consenting act of indifference" that makes all of us partners in hidden violence. He expressed the hope that the Congress could bring together those concerned with their "survival as persons in this age." Laing then alluded to the "unconscious forms of violence" that characterize our time, and spoke of the need for a "micropolitical struggle." "The danger to the homeostasis isn't what people in the system say it is."

Gregory Bateson's address on Monday morning sounded somewhat tame after Saturday's opening. His principal emphasis was on the way in which the products of man's conscious purposes were now in danger of seriously upsetting the underlying balances of nature on which all earthly life depends. Reminding his audience that "a science is nothing but a bag of tricks" he contrasted "systemic wisdom" with "conscious purpose."

Tuesday was Stokely Carmichael's day. (He appeared as a replacement for the originally scheduled Mircea Eliade!) His was a turn-out

[2] It should be noted that the phenomenological orientation of the Institute has been set by Sartre and not Merleau-Ponty—and through Sartre to Marx and Hegel, rather than to Husserl.

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audience and he appeared to have it in the palm of his hand. He frequently invoked the views of the dead Martinican Negro psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon, best known for his *The Wretched of the Earth*. In agreement with Fanon he said that "black men in the United States" were "an internal colony related to colonies around the world" and that the aim of "black America was to hook up with the Third World." He compared the situation of Negroes in America with that of the ghetto Jews in Nazi Germany and said that the black men were arming to prevent their own destruction. The way things were going anyway meant that there would soon be a "black takeover of the cities." An afternoon panel convened to discuss his talk disqualified itself by simply endorsing everything he had said.[3] One of the panel members, George P. Rawick, who said that the leadership of America had now passed to the black man, was told by Carmichael that the only way he as a white man could participate in the black power movement was to take his "orders completely from us."

Wednesday the temperature dropped again. The anthropologist Jules Henry, author of *Culture against Man*, delivered a closely reasoned, factual paper on America's "social and psychological preparation for war." He showed how the post-Depression agreements of government and industry had produced the effective war machine of World War II, and how America's economic prosperity is now dependent on the continued activity of this machine in which "the distinctions of business, military, and government have become illusory." Thus economic euphoria has become linked with the fear of war in a vicious circle.

Thursday John Gerassi, the American journalist and admirer of Che Guevara, discussed conditions in Latin America from the Cuban viewpoint.

On Friday there was a return to reason in the person of the economist Paul Sweezy. Sweezy took exception to the term "Third World," saying that it is actually included within the "two worlds." He pointed out that the development of modern capitalism, probably beginning with Venice in the 8th century, has occurred through a succession of concentrations of wealth in a series of changing metropolises and states. Every new center establishes a new deprived periphery. Thus every new development in capitalism has resulted in a complementary "underdevelopment." Thus the "ideological character of the notion of 'underdevelopment.' "

Ross Speck, an American psychiatrist, opened the second week by describing his "network therapy." Such therapy reaches from an initial person to take in relatives, friends, and acquaintances in a widening circle. This therapy seemed to come closest to something like a psychiatric answer to the problem of alienation as social, as generally accepted by the Congress.

[3] This also turned out to be the last such panel discussion of a principal address.

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Paul Goodman spoke on Tuesday. He said that politics are usually too ambitious and that less should be attempted. He tried to clarify the nature of discrimination in America by asserting that "exploitation does not exist—rather it is exclusion." "Americans aren't racist; their attitude is: 'Why don't They go away?' " If the situation was to be altered it was important to "reduce the grip of authority, the 'obedience syndrome.' " He reminded the youth in his audience that "professionals aren't necessarily finks" and that if they wanted to exercise any real power in today's world they would probably have to begin by becoming some kind of professional. Of all the speakers he probably had the best contact with his predominantly student audience.

On Wednesday the French Marxist philosopher, Lucien Goldmann, delivered a closely reasoned address on the way in which every intellectual act involves exclusions, "repressions," so that the problem, in society as in literary criticism, is how to locate what has been excluded by the existing structures, when they have become obsolete. The problem is not only how to create a society with the minimum necessary amount of repression, but how to maintain this minimum under continuously changing conditions.

Gayo Petrović described on Thursday the editorial policy of the "transnational" philosophical journal *Praxis,* published in Zagreb and of which he is one of the editors. The aim of this journal is to reclaim Marx for philosophy. It is also concerned with social and political issues.

The final principal speaker was Herbert Marcuse on Friday. Modern industrial society, he said, such as that of America, "has rendered obsolete the traditional goals of the affluent society" and "traditional Judaeo-Christian morality." But America is dominated by "a system violently defending its own servitude" so that "violent social change is objectively necessary." "The new values are there among the excluded elements of the population." Later he answered a question about the "hippies" by saying that "the hippies are split: much is clownerie, harmless; there is also an inherent political element, emergence of new instinctual needs and values, a revolt against insane reasonableness."

In many ways it had a been a confusing Congress. Held in London but dominated by the American presence, the invisible figures invoked by the Congress had, with the exception of Marx, all been French: Sartre, Fanon, Artaud, Gabel, and even perhaps—who knows?—André Breton. It was Marcuse who, in the closing days of the conference, casually suggested that the most clairvoyant prophet of our present possibilities had been that early nineteenth-century theorist of the *"phalansteries,"* François Charles Marie Fourier, who, though later dismissed as mad, was the inspiration for Brook Farm, the Oneida Community and lastly for André Breton himself, who wrote his "Ode to Fourier" in New York City during his wartime exile.

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Reviews

MARVIN MUDRICK

Sarraute, Duras, Burroughs, Barthelme, and a Postscript[1]

IF IT ISN'T A NOVEL, WHAT IS IT? Among "the most curious features of our literary epoch," says Sartre in his introduction to one of Mme. Sarraute's books, is "the appearance . . . of penetrating and entirely negative works that may be called anti-novels. . . . They are works of the imagination with fictitious characters, whose story they tell. But . . . their aim is to make use of the novel in order to challenge the novel, to destroy it before our very eyes while seeming to construct it." Not that Sartre thinks they show any "weakness of the novel as a genre; all they show is that we live in a period of reflection and that the novel is reflecting on its own problems."

Mme. Sarraute thinks they show nothing less than the death of the traditional novel. "Character" and "psychology," names and clothes, kinships and commodities, themes and plots—all those Balzacian engines—are played out. "Since the happy days of Eugénie Grandet when, at the height of his power, the character occupied the place of honor between reader and novelist, . . . he has continued to lose, one after the other, his attributes and prerogatives . . . from the silver buckles on his breeches to the veined wart on the end of his nose." (Balzac is the indispensable bull in the china shop of French literary decorum. If he had not existed, Mme. Sarraute would have been obliged to import him from Smollett's or Dickens' England.) "The character as conceived in the old-style novel . . . does not succeed in

1 TROPISMS, by *Nathalie Sarraute*. Braziller. $3.50. PORTRAIT OF A MAN UNKNOWN, by *Nathalie Sarraute*. Braziller. $3.50. MARTEREAU, by *Nathalie Sarraute*. Braziller. $3.75. THE PLANETARIUM, by *Nathalie Sarraute*. Braziller. $4.00. THE GOLDEN FRUITS, by *Nathalie Sarraute*. Braziller. $4.00. THE AGE OF SUSPICION, by *Nathalie Sarraute*. Braziller. $4.00. 4 NOVELS (THE SQUARE, MODERATO CANTABILE, 10:30 ON A SUMMER NIGHT, THE AFTERNOON OF MR. ANDESMAS), by *Marguerie Duras*. Evergreen Black Cat. $1.95. HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR, by *Marguerite Duras*. Evergreen Original. $1.95. THE RAVISHING OF LOL STEIN, by *Marguerite Duras*. Grove. $3.95. THE SAILOR FROM GIBRALTAR, by *Marguerite Duras*. Grove. $5.95. NAKED LUNCH, by *William S. Burroughs*. Evergreen Black Cat. $1.25. THE SOFT MACHINE, by *William S. Burroughs*. Evergreen Black Cat. $.95. NOVA EXPRESS, by *William S. Burroughs*. Grove. $5.00. THE TICKET THAT EXPLODED, by *William S. Burroughs*. Grove. $5.00. COME BACK, DR. CALIGARI, by *Donald Barthelme*. Anchor. $.95. SNOW WHITE, by *Donald Barthelme*. Atheneum. $4.50. WHEN SHE WAS GOOD, by *Philip Roth*. Random House. $5.95.

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containing the psychological reality of today. . . . So that, as a result of an evolution similar to that in painting, . . . the psychological element, like the pictorial element, is beginning to free itself imperceptibly from the object of which it was an integral part."

Tropisms, though just published here, was Mme. Sarraute's first book. It was also her source book, providing "all the raw material that I have continued to develop in my later works." Narrative, warts, personalized psychology give way—so the title suggests—to certain organic tendencies: barely perceivable minutiae of motive, "tropisms" almost botanical in their dissociation from will and consciousness, "certain inner 'movements' . . . in the form of undefinable, extremely rapid sensations. . . . Since, while we are performing them, no words express them, not even those of the interior monologue . . . [the novelist could not] communicate them to the reader otherwise than by means of equivalent images that would make him experience analogous sensations. It was also necessary to make them break up and spread out in the consciousness of the reader the way a slow-motion film does. Time was no longer the time of real life, but of a hugely amplified present."

"That too is possible" (Stravinsky reports Rimsky-Korsakov's comment on somebody else's new symphony). But *Tropisms* itself, far more modest than its author's claims for it, is a pamphlet-sized collection of vignettes most of which manage to be at the same time tiny, diffuse, and banal. In one of them, for example, a professor, "like the gentleman in the advertisements who . . . smilingly recommends Saponite," enjoys "prying, with the dignity of professional gestures, with relentless, expert hands, into the secret places of Proust or Rimbaud . . ."; while,

> Avoiding the shops filled with pretty things, the women trotting briskly along, the café waiters, the medical students, the traffic policemen, the clerks from notary offices, Rimbaud or Proust, having been torn from life, cast out from life and deprived of support, were probably wandering aimlessly through the streets, or dozing away, their hands resting on their chests, in some dusty public square.

Or consider the city people, who inhabit "apartments giving on to dark courtyards, perfectly decent, however, and comfortably equipped," people who "never tried to recall the place in the country where once they had played, . . . never tried to recapture the color and the smell of the little town they had grown up in," and so forth. This bucolic mawkishness is the obverse of the author's hatred for the petty bourgeoisie, especially its women:

> With their handbags under their arms, their gauntlet gloves, their little regulation "bibis" at just the right angle on their heads, their long, stiff lashes set in bulging lids, their hard eyes, they trotted

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along in front of the shop windows, stopped all of a sudden, ferreted about with an avid, knowing look.

"Sensible men" condescend to the illustrious dead, while living poets roam the streets unhonored; Wordsworthian country pleasures haven't yet perished in Mme. Sarraute's not quite steely bosom; women on the lookout for bargains make an unattractive spectacle. Only once or twice in the book does the method achieve something like a Joycean epiphany; disclosing, for instance, the consciousness of a little boy taken for a walk by his mild, fussy grandfather, who likes to talk

> . . . about his advanced age and his death. "What will you say when you won't have any more grandfather, he'll be gone, your grandfather will, because he's old, you know, very old, it will soon be time for him to die. Do you know what people do when they die? Your grandfather too had a mamma once. But where is she now? Yes! Yes! Where is she now, darling? She's gone, he hasn't any more mamma, she's been dead a long time, his mamma has, she's gone, there's no more mamma, she's dead."
>
> The air was still and gray, odorless, and the houses rose up on either side of the street, the flat masses of the houses, closed and dreary, surrounded them as they proceeded slowly along the pavement, hand in hand. And the child felt that something was weighing upon him, benumbing him. A soft choking mass that somebody relentlessly made him take, by exerting upon him a gentle, firm pressure, by pinching his nose a bit to make him swallow it, without his being able to resist—penetrated him, while he trotted docilely along, like a good little boy, obediently holding out his little hand, nodding his head very reasonably, while it was explained to him that he should always proceed cautiously and look well, first to the right, then to the left, and be careful, very careful, for fear of an accident, when crossing between the lines.

That too is possible; it is even very good; but it doesn't justify manifestoes.

Even at its best, Mme. Sarraute's method justifies attention but not manifestoes. Her least interesting books are *Tropisms* and *The Age of Suspicion* (which is the expectable collection of tendentious essays by a practitioner of the *nouveau roman*). The silliest is *The Golden Fruits,* a catty and trivial exposé of French literary society, which on the evidence of the book combines the least attractive features of an academic cocktail party and a public hanging.

Portrait of a Man Unknown, however, deserves attention. It is Mme. Sarraute's first full-scale application of her method; and it makes clear her self-admitted affinities with the Dostoevsky of *Notes from Underground.* Yet the differences in intention (not to speak of differences in power of realization) are much greater than she might be willing to acknowledge. Dostoevsky's underground man wanders forever in the

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labyrinths of motive, which have been opened by the nineteenth-century denial of will and action: the horror is metaphysical, it is in the endlessness of his quest, not in the malice he dredges up along the way. Mme. Sarraute, on the other hand, limits herself to observing the sporadic jets of spleen and hatred that she considers "the secret source" (doesn't she wish to say, rather, the most immediate manifestation?) "of our existence"; as when the rich and miserly old bourgeois thinks he has surprised his daughter in the act of stealing a bit of household soap:

> He began to hurry, quick, no time to look for his slippers, and barefooted and in his nightshirt he raced through the hall to the kitchen and climbed on a chair to look: there it was, on the shelf above the sink—the bar of soap was there, the edge fresh cut, the very edge, sharp and well defined, of reality itself. . . .
>
> By now he had reached the very limit. He had plumbed the very depths. There was no need to look any further. After this paroxysm he felt a sort of relief. The clutched hand about his throat and chest had relaxed, he was breathing more freely as he returned to bed, carrying it with him—this concrete, hard fact—like a bone to be gnawed upon, undisturbed, in his kennel. . . . He had been right in his impression that the soap had been vanishing pretty fast of late. . . . Like the butter last year, and the shoe polish . . .

People need each other, but not for love: "contact" is what they seek (for which—crab-like, insect-like—they make use of their "tentacles," "delicate little suckers," "sticky juice"); but, people being what they are, contact prompts every one of them to secrete quantities of hatred and malice, puffs up his "poison sac" (another of Mme. Sarraute's recurrent images) until it bursts and flows.

This is a special but not altogether implausible view of things. The episodes and relationships that illustrate it are often tedious enough to undermine the reader's patience; but evidently Mme. Sarraute will stop at nothing toward her aim of defining paranoia as the characteristic mode of consciousness. *Martereau* supplies a fresh set of episodes, and (except for an additionally irritating element of detective-story mystification) works in much the same way.

Martereau also has a few touches of what might be called the comedy of paranoia; for instance, in the game of one-upmanship played between an aging boorish man and his stubborn shrew of a wife:

> This time she's held her own for a long time. The matter at stake is worth it: that awful suburban house that he persists in wanting to buy, and then, above all, to punish him severely for his outburst of fury, his rudeness, the entire house had resounded with his shouting.

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> With him, once the usual first phase is over—threatening silence, angry looks, sour remarks addressed to us, to his daughter and to me, and which, we all know, are aimed at her—his strength diminishes visibly. It's been evident for some time now, that he would like to patch it up: during the last few days, he has been making timid, touching efforts to edge in sidewise on the conversations she has with us at every meal, growing proportionately more sprightly and full of life as his level lowers.

Man, the autonomous and parasitic animal, exists submerged in his feelings, moods, euphoria and depression, self-love and self-loathing, which exercise themselves pretending to be reasonable (and therefore derivable from relations with persons and things), voluntary (and therefore independent of such relations), flowing out of unconscious sources (and therefore anterior to will and reason), and which outwit all explanations by the power of their presence and the unpredictability of their direction. Mme. Sarraute's best book is *The Planetarium,* chiefly because its great opening episode is the apotheosis of this sort of comedy: among all of the author's cranky and interminable disembodied voices, the dazzling virtuoso aria. The episode is Dostoevskian because, for once, Mme. Sarraute exposes the metaphysical horror at the heart of grievance, resentment, malice, apprehension, the sense of the heavens opening out into the void for the little old lady pacing her redecorated apartment, driven half-mad by the irreparable indifference of what is outside the self:

> So, believe it or not, I went... at eleven o'clock at night... I know her. In any case, I was done for, she would have waked me at six in the morning... she would have spent the entire night walking up and down in front of her door like a caged animal. . . I saw right away, as soon as I got there, that she was in a bad way. She looked fairly haggard. And the entire place was in what, for her, was terrible disorder; a can of furniture polish on the table, bottles and rags of every description on the floor... She let me in, a rag in her hand: Come and see, it's incredible what they've gone and done, your friend Renouvier is no good... Look at the door... I saw an awful new door such as you see everywhere, a pretentious, interior decorator's sort of door, which was there nobody knew why ... A mad idea she had had all of a sudden... But I didn't say anything, it was too late, there was no longer any question of that ... the fingerprint plaque had been removed and it had left holes in the wood, tiny marks that had been stopped up with putty and which she was rubbing, painting with all her might... Almost weeping she begged me... Look... tell me the truth, I can't judge any more, I can't see anything but that... The nail marks were undoubtedly visible... If she had said nothing, I shouldn't have noticed anything, but now that she had told me... It was, indeed,

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> too bad, but there was no doubt about it, I did see them. Some devil must have prompted me, I couldn't help saying to her: Oh, if you don't think about it, you can hardly see anything, but now that you've told me, I do see the filled-in spots. . . But so tiny. . . you have to know they're there. . .

So much energy! But the rest of *The Planetarium* is the mixture as before, expertly put together, really another novel about the stupid lives of very disagreeable people. Mme. Sarraute has devoted her career to dramatizing the psychopathology of everyday life. But everyday life—crazy or not—turns out to be, with certain volcanic exceptions, as lavishly dull as other novelists have already led us to suspect.

Marguerite Duras, who for some reason gets classified with Mme. Sarraute during literary fun and games, is a lot glossier. The front of the dustjacket of her latest novel exhibits a handsome photograph of Jeanne Moreau, who stars in the movie version, and while it was being filmed—if testimony at a recent divorce trial may be trusted—lived the rôle of the swinging heroine as enthusiastically off the set as on. *The Sailor from Gibraltar* is the kind of novel that provokes the reader to speculate about the kind of movie it will make: this sleek, low-keyed (no-keyed) scenario, awaiting incarnation in wide screen and long gauzy shots of distant islands. (Much of Conrad, who was an innovator not only in his talents but in his defects, anticipated by a half-century the need for such a medium of snail-paced visualizations and the enormous drowned eyes of closeups.)

It is hard to take Mme. Duras seriously, but Germaine Brée does: "The sixth of . . . [her] novels, *The Square* . . . , is the first in which she experimented with a new stylized form of story telling which, without being analytical, would bring to light certain fundamental patterns of human feeling." (Observe that the patterns are "fundamental" and the feeling is "human"; nothing so naked as a surface or an animal could survive the armored-car redundancies of Mme. Brée's *Yale French Studies* prose.) In Mme. Duras's sixth novel, quite ordinary people sound fundamentally human as they deliver pithy statements about *la condition humaine:*

> ". . . When I was twenty I was smart and gay and played tennis. That is how my life started. I mean a life can begin anyhow—a fact we do not appreciate enough. And then time passes and we discover that life has very few solutions: and things become established until one fine day we find they are so established that the very idea of changing them seems absurd."

In Mme. Duras's eighth novel, we learn not to discount woman's intuition:

> Maria could have told just from Claire's breasts that they were in love. [It had better be noted that Claire is fully clothed.] They were

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going to lie down there, next to her, separated while torn and tortured by desire. And both were smiling, equally guilty, terrified and happy.

"We waited for you," Pierre repeated.

Even Claire raised her eyes. Then she lowered them and only a vague, indelible smile remained on her face. Maria would have known just from seeing her eyes lowered on that smile. . . .

Correspondences, coincidences, analogies crowd the pages. Voyeurs, accomplices, eavesdroppers station themselves on balconies, in fields, outside windows. Life is simple and terrible, oscillating between apathy and passion, and women know all about it, and if they drink too much (they do, you know) it's because they can't otherwise bear what they know. "None of it makes any sense," muses the superlatively uninteresting lunatic heroine of *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (Mme. Duras's tenth novel). And then there is Mme. Duras's screenplay for *Hiroshima Mon Amour,* that bare-assed scented-armpit high-camp lowdown on Apocalypse:

HE *(softly):* Stay in Hiroshima with me.

(She doesn't reply. Then we hear her voice in an interior monologue, loud and uncontrolled:)

SHE: He's going to come toward me, he's going to take me by the shoulders, he's-going-to-kiss-me... .

He'll kiss me ... and I'll be lost. *(The word "lost" is said almost ecstatically.)* . . . .

HE: Maybe it's possible for you to stay.

SHE: You know it's not. Still more impossible than to leave. . . .

HE: I would have preferred that you had died at Nevers.

SHE: So would I. But I didn't die at Nevers.

Against such a smog of complacency, almost any of William Burroughs' spastic ballets of free-association might for a moment look like truth, beauty, and the new dawn:

A contingent of howling simopaths swing from chandeliers, balconies and trees, shitting and pissing on passers-by. (A simopath—the technical name for this disorder escapes me—is a citizen convinced he is an ape or other simian. It is a disorder peculiar to the army, and discharge cures it.) Amoks trot along cutting off heads, faces sweet and remote with a dreamy half smile....Citizens with incipient Bang-utot clutch their penises and call on the tourists for help....Arab rioters yipe and howl, castrating, disembowelling, throw burning gasoline....Dancing boys strip-tease with intestines, women stick severed genitals in their cunts, grind, bump and flick it at the man of their choice....Religious fanatics harangue the crowd from helicopters and rain stone tablets on their heads, inscribed with meaningless messages....Leopard Men tear people to

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pieces with iron claws, coughing and grunting....Kwakiutl Cannibal Society initiates bite off noses and ears....

A coprophage calls for a plate, shits on it and eats the shit, exclaiming, "Mmmm, that's my rich substance."

A battalion of rampant bores prowls the streets and hotel lobbies in search of victims. An intellectual avant-gardist—"Of course the only writing worth considering now is to be found in scientific reports and periodicals"—has given someone a bulbocapnine injection and is preparing to read him a bulletin on "the use of neo-hemoglobin in the control of multiple degenerative granuloma." (Of course the reports are all gibberish he has concocted and printed up.)

A reader might, recoiling from Mme. Duras, be glad to laugh at such impudence and overlook the desperate non-joke in the second paragraph, the academic humor in the last, the pedantry of the opening with its explanatory parenthesis and its replay of Swift's Yahoos (Burroughs is a very bookish writer, he goes on for pages ponderously echoing Eliotic tag-lines). At any rate, the reader will not be permitted merely to laugh, since Burroughs insists—all joking aside—that he's as unfunny as any other over-applauded coterie writer: "There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*. . . . I am a recording instrument. . . . I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity.' . . . I am not an entertainer. . . ."

Laugh at a comedian and he wants to preach a sermon, sing first tenor, concoct a theory, play Hamlet. Thus the metamorphosis of fag-and-junky cockroach into philosopher-prince, calm eye of the hurricane, guru and missionary to the squares, darling of the superannuated hipsters, scourge of bureaucracy and totalitarianism, emetic and moralist of his time. Thus (despite the disclaimer of interest in anything so trivial as story-plot-continuity) the presumptuous imposition of a tidy narrative grid about invading Venusian viruses and grim-jawed interplanetary police (who, unlike the corrupted earth cops, are *good*):

Grey Police of The Regulator, calm and grey with inflexible authority. Willy had worked with them before. He knew they were undercover agents working under conditions as dangerous as his own. They were dedicated men . . .

This is quite serious and reads like the love-song of J. Edgar Hoover; for Burroughs—mirror-image of the law—is an unrequited cop-lover at heart, the outlaw overawed by God the Enforcer. Burroughs doesn't want to make jokes, he'd rather tell us what he's learned from his life of crime; most of his writing isn't entertainment, it's naïve wheedling explicitness, greasy kid-stuff: pathic celebrations of "inflexible au-

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thority"; warnings against drug addiction by the junky who knows; denunciations of Madison Avenue; jeremiads against horrid technological America by the sinner who has nowhere else so richly explored the "American" vices as in a dozen countries without technology; reams (if you'll pardon the expression) of lyrically unvarying how-to-do-it descriptions of anonymous homosexual penetrations in every quarter of the globe.

Burroughs' claque of Mailer, Ginsberg, *et al.* would like to push him into the company of Swift and Joyce; but any page of *Guilliver* or of the Nighttown episode in *Ulysses* demonstrates that intelligence and constructive power are helpful to the great comic artist. Burroughs has very little of either. What he does have, when he deigns to exert it, is a talent for night-club turns, small-scale comic improvisations:

> His front teeth had been stomped out by bestial American sailors in Brooklyn. Vultures had eaten out an eye when he drank a pint of paregoric and passed out in a Panama City park. He had been trapped between floors in an elevator for five days with an oil-burning junk habit and sustained an attack of D.T.s while stowing away in a foot locker. Then there was the time he collapsed with strangulated intestines, perforated ulcers and peritonitis in Cairo and the hospital was so crowded they bedded him in the latrine, and the Greek surgeon goofed and sewed up a live monkey in him, and he was gang-fucked by the Arab attendants, and one of the orderlies stole the penicillin substituting Saniflush; and the time he got clap in his ass and a self-righteous English doctor cured him with an enema of hot sulphuric acid, and the German practitioner of Technological Medicine who removed his appendix with a rusty can opener and a pair of tin snips (he considered the germ theory "a nonsense"). Flushed with success he then began snipping and cutting out everything in sight: "The human body is filled up vit unnecessitated parts. You can get by vit one kidney. Vy have two? Yes dot is a kidney....The inside parts should not be so close in together crowded. They need lebensraum like the Vaterland."

In this (often misfiring) comedy of random outrage the victim copes and philosophizes, as the Male Hustler does recollecting one or another disagreeable client from outer space:

> "I am fucking this citizen so I think, 'A straight John at last'; but he comes to a climax and turns himself into some kinda awful crab. ... I told him, 'Jack, I don't hafta stand still for such a routine like this....You can take that business to Walgreen's.' Some people got no class to them. Another horrible old character just sits there and telepathizes and creams in his dry goods. So nasty."

When he digresses and is being funny—*i. e.,* an entertainer—Burroughs recalls not Swift or Joyce but another entertainer, Lenny Bruce,

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also a specialist in the comedy of free-associational vernacular outrage, also a pariah by choice of drugs and subject-matter. One difference between them is that Bruce didn't live long enough to settle into literary sainthood. Burroughs did, and, trusting his idolators, he has become progressively stuffier and more vatic since *Naked Lunch* (from which all but one of the foregoing quotes were taken); till now, in *The Ticket that Exploded,* he scatters among his short-winded and repetitive fantasies a metaphysics, an eschatology, a theory of possession by demonic tape recorders, a theory of sexuality, an assault on advertising as a form of brainwashing, the usual quota of flashbulb-and-firecracker sodomies, and some suggestions for mind-changing party games. Everything but jokes.

Burroughs is a footnote in the history of censorship. America is the great consumer society, and everybody who can pay will sooner or later get what he wants because somewhere out there is somebody determined to find a way to sell it to him. If you want to palpitate in phase with innumerable intimate accounts of heroin fixes and pederasties around the world, Barney Rosset will send Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg, and a covey of lawyers up to Boston to beat down a bewildered judge with gabble about artistic profundity and social importance. In America the customer is always right: hypocrisy and the dollar have done more for the expansion of consciousness than the death of God and LSD and the literati (some of whom, like George P. Elliott and George Steiner, have already chickened out on the issue of freedom and the public). Censorship is the lost Atlantis under the waters of commercial greed. It is a blessing to have Burroughs (not to mention many others) in print and taken seriously, even by himself; even if he would rather be a thinker than a comedian.

Donald Barthelme is another comedian who seems to have turned thinker. His first book, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari,* is an engaging collection of casual comic experiments, strictly from college humor often, none of them coming off with a bang but each carrying at least a small jolt. There are a few absurdist exercises, aleatory fiction, analogous to John Cage's music for twelve radios and twelve operators, like reading in rapid succession paragraph one on page two of every third novel on a single shelf in the library; there is a story about adultery written in the style of a children's primer; and a story about a thirty-five-year-old man in a sixth-grade class. The funniest piece is a relatively conventional story, "The Big Broadcast of 1938," about a man who buys a radio station to win back his wife:

> Bloomsbury could now play "The Star-Spangled Banner," which he had always admired immoderately, on account of its finality, as often as he liked. It meant, to him, that everything was finished. Therefore he played it daily, 60 times between 6 and 10 A.M., 120 times between 12 noon and 7 P.M., and the whole night long except when, as was sometimes the case, he was talking.

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Bloomsbury's radio talks were of two kinds, called the first kind and the second kind. The first consisted of singling out, for special notice, from among all the others, some particular word in the English language, and repeating it in a monotonous voice for as much as fifteen minutes, or a quarter-hour. The word thus singled out might be any word, the word *nevertheless* for example. . . .

The second kind of radio talk . . . was the commercial announcement.

. . . Frequently he would begin somewhat in this vein:

"Well, old girl" (he began), "here we are, me speaking into the tube, you lying on your back most likely, giving an ear, I don't doubt. Swell of you to tune me in. I remember the time you went walking without your shoes, what an evening! You were wearing, I recall, your dove-gray silk, with a flower hat, and you picked your way down the boulevard as daintily as a real lady. . . ."

The trouble with the hero of "Florence Green Is 81" is that he is "slow":

"That's a slow boy, that one," his first teacher said. "That boy is what you call *real slow*," his second teacher said. "That's a *slow son of a bitch*," his third teacher said.

A writer of such resources ought not to practice (as he often does, in this story and in others) the sort of juvenile humor that combines a flip tone with implications of unplumbable melancholy:

. . . the only way I can relax it, I refer to the stomach, is by introducing quarts of Fleischmann's Gin. Fleischmann's I have found is a magnificent source of tension reduction, I favor the establishment of comfort stations providing free Fleischmann's on every street corner of the city of Santa Ana, California, and all other cities. Be serious, can't you?

He's laughing on the outside, but inside he's hurting. It's the unplumbable melancholy that drowns Mr. Barthelme's wit, and exposes the editorial anxieties he seems to consider more important than sixty consecutive performances of "The Star-Spangled Banner"; for he broods about our overseas commitments and the human condition as Florence Green, at 81, broods about Buchenwald:

She proceeded by car from Tempelhof to a hotel in the American zone, registered, dined, sat in a chair in the lobby for a time observing the American lieutenant colonels and their healthy German girls, and then walked out into the street. The first German man she saw was a policeman directing traffic. He wore a uniform. Florence walked out into the traffic island and tugged at his sleeve. He bent politely toward the nice old American lady. She lifted her cane, the cane of 1927 from Yellowstone, and cracked his head with it. He fell in a heap in the middle of the street. . . .

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Snow White promotes this sort of self-indulgence into an almost seamless morbidity. Mr. Barthelme, having decided to exploit his megrims, has written a remarkably slick pseudo-avantgarde novel, maybe the most cunningly modish book of the decade. He begins with the fairytale situation (one beautiful girl, and seven men serving her); disassembles the structure into episodes just discontinuous enough to persuade the up-to-date reader that he's reading something up-to-date (the most brazen trick is the use of billboard-type interchapters printed in full caps, which thump out the author's notions of gnomic wisdom: "THE VALUE THE MIND SETS ON EROTIC NEEDS INSTANTLY SINKS AS SOON AS SATISFACTION BECOMES READILY AVAILABLE"); and sophisticates the fable with every anxiety of the dyspeptic American intellectual: the human condition ("this bag that we are in"); "the quality of life in our great country, America"; the quality of life in suburbia ("Perhaps they wept in the evenings, after dinner, in the family room"); the unsatisfactoriness of politics ("We are going to save up all our votes for the next twenty years. . . . Maybe by that time there will be some Rabelaisian figure worth spending them on"); the unrenewability of language (" 'OH I wish there were some words in the world that were not the words I always hear!' Snow White exclaimed loudly"); the pervasiveness of sexual symbolism in language (" 'This filthy,' Henry said, 'this language thinking and stinking everlastingly of sex, screw, breech, "part," shaft, not, male, it is no wonder we are all going round the bend' "); the inadequacy of men ("The seven of them only add up to the equivalent of about two *real men,* as we know them from the films and from our childhood"); the inadequacy and multitudinousness of women ("the world is full of cunts. . . . The point is that the loss of any particular one is not to be taken seriously"); the hatefulness of contact ("Bill can't bear to be touched"); the inadequacy and troublesomeness of sex:

> "Now it is necessary to court her, and win her, and put on this clean suit, and cut my various nails, and drink something that will kill the millions of germs in my mouth, and say something flattering, and be witty and bonny, and hale and kinky, and pay her a thousand dollars, all just to ease this wrinkle in the groin. It seems a high price." Henry let his mind stray to his groin. Then he let his mind stray to her groin. Do girls have groins? The wrinkle was still there. "The remedy of Origen. That is still open to one. That door, at least, has not been shut."

What bitterness! What nausea! It fair gives a chap the existential trembles. But Mr. Barthelme is telling a fib. None of his characters shows signs of having enough momentum to amputate a hangnail, let alone do the job on himself that Origen did. Mr. Barthelme is a fashionable name-dropper here, and his clever novel is just a piece of interior decorating.

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Absurdism, black comedy, the anti-novel huff and puff against the traditional novel, which is (as Mr. Barthelme might say) part of "the bag that we are in." Two centuries ago Sterne wrote the first and best anti-novel, agreeing with Mme. Sarraute that (1) a character in fiction is not a stuffed sausage with a label, but a loose assortment of tics and tendencies ("tropisms," Mme. Sarraute calls them; "undefinable, extremely rapid sensations"); (2) the inside joke of fiction is that any private event, any sensation takes longer to describe than to happen (the novelist, according to Mme. Sarraute, must "break [it] up and spread [it] out in the consciousness of the reader the way a slow-motion film does"); and (3) plot is the obsolete pretense of cosmic design ("nothing but a conventional code that we apply to life," says Mme. Sarraute; "I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity,'" grumps Mr. Burroughs). Sterne proved that fiction can dispense with just about everything except time and sensation, each of which the language of fiction deforms and measures against the other.

But literary genres—not only human beings—live in their superfluities as characteristically as in their needs. In the same year as *Snow White* Philip Roth has published *When She Was Good,* which is in effect a posthumous Dreiser novel, with much family-album verisimilitude ("Edward's bronchitis had lingered nearly three weeks") and some acutely observed American domesticity. Roth continues, clumsily and anachronistically, to be gnawed—as he was in that underrated novel, *Letting Go*—by the problems of sin and responsibility. Why do destructive people behave as they do? How do they persuade themselves that they are good? How does it *feel* to be bad? Roth cares about such questions, stumbling along in the burlap sack of his prose:

> This battle, too, she had fought and this battle, too, she had won, and yet it seemed that she had never in her life been miserable in the way that she was miserable now. Yes, all that she had wanted had come to be, but the illusion she had, as they drove home through the storm, was that she was never going to die—she was going to live forever in this new world she had made, and never die, and never have the chance not just to be right, but to be happy.

Roth can even, under the stimulus of a climactic scene, revive such questions for his readers, he can hear every vibration of the terrible small voice of righteousness confronting an unworthy adversary:

> She got up and went into the bathroom. Into the mirror she said, "Twenty-two. I am only twenty-two."
> When she came back into the living room the radio was playing.
> "How you feeling?" he asked.
> "Fine."
> "Aren't you all right, Lucy?"
> "I'm feeling *fine.*"

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"Look, I didn't mean I'm going to *publish* a book even if I could."

"If you want to publish a book, Roy, publish a book!"

"Well, I won't! I was just having some fun. Jee—*zuz*." He picked up one of his family's old copies of *Life* and began leafing through it. He slumped into his chair, threw back his head and said, "Wow."

"What?"

"The radio. Hear that? 'It Might As Well Be Spring.' You know who that was my song with? Bev Collison. Boy. Skinny Bev. I wonder whatever happened to her."

"How would I know?"

"Who said you'd know? I was only reminded of her by the song. Well, what's wrong with that?" he asked. "Boy, this is really some Valentine's Day night!"

A little later he pulled open the sofa, and they laid out the blanket and pillows. When the lights were off and they were in bed, he said that she had been looking tired, and probably she would feel better in the morning. He said he understood.

Understood what? Feel better why?

Righteousness has it own sheer cliffs.

When She Was Good is, most of it, hopelessly old-fashioned, and it is an interesting novel. Why not? The novel, of all artifacts, remains the one least divisible from its artificer, whose idiosyncrasies and judgments may prevail over the demands of the genre itself. Roth's mind, besieged by archaic American drearinesses, is more interesting than Barthelme's or Burroughs'. Novels are too long, the novelist can't get away with gimmicks or momentary flashes; he has to disclose substance and continuity somewhere, perhaps in himself.

Even Mme. Sarraute, emerging from behind her dialectic for half a paragraph, tells the truth about her own work: that "isolated, maladjusted, lonely individuals, morbidly attached to their childhood, withdrawn into themselves and cultivating a more or less conscious taste for a certain form of defeat, by giving in to an apparently useless obsession, succeed in digging up and laying bare a fragment of reality that is still unknown." Out of such a temperament, not out of any exclusionist theory, comes what is sustained and impressive in her fiction. Luckily for all of us, there are other temperaments also.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Mr. Appolinax

THE BOOK IS SELLING WELL:[1] Korvettes, not taken in by many things literary, gives Bertrand Russell a place on the shelf in its "books and records" department. Of course these days people don't buy records, they buy Stereo (Korvettes is eagerly shipping its despised Monaurals back to the dealers), and at first glance—a Prologue titled "What I Have Lived For"—it seems that Russell is out to provide the essential stereophonic touch: "Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the sufferings of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair." A few paragraphs later he assures us that he *has* found life worth living; the immediate guess then is that the *Autobiography* will number among its readers curious ones who haven't spent much time with *Mysticism and Logic* or *Our Knowledge of the External World,* and who don't of course agree with Russell's politics, but who find him stimulating, also old enough to speak from the vantage of wisdom. As an added bonus, there is something called literary style which can be admired; the aged eagle still writes beautifully, etc.[2]

It should be made clear that in no sense does the *Autobiography* need apologizing for, nor should it be used merely as a springboard for a general rehearsal of Russell's undeniable importance as a modern philosopher. In discussing his *Principles of Mathematics,* written at a time of personal misery, he is at pains to connect certain defects in the book with the "unreal, insincere, and sentimental frame of mind into which I had allowed myself to fall." A defect in the work argues a "moral defect in my state of mind." Clearly the defects of unreality, insincerity and sentimentality are ones that any man, most of all the scrupulous Bertrand Russell, would attempt to keep out of a final summing up, and to admire the *Autobiography* is to find them largely absent. But there are other, perhaps subtler, "defects" present; I use quotation marks only to suggest how completely bound up they are with the virtues and pleasures of Russell's voice—not the stereo-

[1] THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BERTRAND RUSSELL. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $7.95.

[2] Most or all of the book seems to have been written between 1949 and 1952. Much of it has appeared unchanged, or in expanded or contracted forms, in *Portraits from Memory* (1956) and *My Philosophical Development* (1959); the latter book is the one to consult for those who want a more philosophically dense and thorough sense of Russell's intellectual growth.

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phonic voice of the Preface, but a more pervasive and a foxier one. However interested we are in the postures of the "I" who moves through these pages, now triumphant, now abashed, our central focus of concern is the frame of mind, the composed personality of the writer who sets his puppet in motion; and the powerfully engaging personality who controls the *Autobiography* is at a very far remove from the noble soul revealed in the Free Man's Worship rhetoric which occasionally crops up.

Two of Russell's best critics, Santayana and Wyndham Lewis, came to essentially similar estimates of his stylistic virtues. Santayana's long essay in *Winds of Doctrine*—mainly an exposition of Russell's intellectual position—was written in the days of "A Free Man's Worship" and perhaps with that in mind Santayana said that Russell

> sometimes gives vent to a rather emphatic pessimism about this world; he has a keen sense for the manifold absurdities of existence. But the sense for absurdities is not without its delights, and Mr. Russell's satirical wit is more constant and better grounded than his despair. I should be inclined to say of his philosophy what he himself has said of that of Leibnitz, that it is at its best in those subjects which are most remote from human life.

Twenty years later, Lewis in *Time and Western Man* put it even more succinctly: "He is a sort of born entertainer: and his entertainer's instinct has always led him to take the 'entertaining' or 'exciting' side in the debate." It's doubtless true that almost any autobiographer composing his youth feels bound to exercise at least a trifle of satirical wit, and certainly tries to be reasonably entertaining about his foibles. Here is Yeats narrating an ordinary bit of revery: "At North End we had a pear tree in the garden and plenty of pears, but the pears used to be full of maggots, and almost opposite lived a schoolmaster named O'Neill, and when a little boy told me that the schoolmaster's great-grandfather had been a king I did not doubt it." The art of composition here is largely a matter of using naive connectives ("but," "and") to connect what doesn't belong together (pears full of maggots and schoolmaster O'Neill), or belongs together only in the reverie which creates childhood. When this little boy goes on to play Manfred or Alastor, any condescension toward romantic extravagance is tempered by our knowledge that W. B. Yeats, man and boy, meant business in his play. The limits put on the "I" are not neatly determined, and the book feels relatively open, breathing with possibility, never allowing us to feel sure whether something has been presented as an absurdity of existence or the very sign of truth.

Russell, as to be expected, cultivates with relish and names without hesitation the absurdities of his childhood existence, whether in speaking of himself or of those who surrounded him at his grand-

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mother's Pembroke's Lodge. He hears the grown-ups asking one another "When is that young Lyon coming?", pricks up his ears and asks if there is a lion coming, to which they reply, yes, on Sunday. He counts the hours till Sunday, then is ushered into the drawing-room to meet the young lion and there is "an ordinary young man named Lyon. I was utterly overwhelmed by the disenchantment and still remember with anguish the depths of my despair." The event is fully and conclusively labeled; perfectly right you should remember, we agree, and turn the page in anticipation of another good story. It is there, this time involving Aunt Lottie who, on her train to the continent suddenly remembers she doesn't know the surname of the footman George who has just seen her off: "Just after the train had started she put her head out of the window and called out, 'George, George, what's your name?' 'George, My Lady,' came the answer. By that time he was out of earshot." Russell's paradigmatic anecdote seems to be one in which the terms somehow cancel one another out, leaving us simply with an exclamation, hands upraised to the sky. When young Bertie tries to feign sleep by "making himself stiff," thinking that is how people unconvincingly feign sleep, he hears the grown-ups say "He is not asleep because he is making himself stiff." When everyone at lunch gets an orange but himself, on the conviction that fruit is bad for children, he names the orangeless object: "A plate and nothing on it. Everybody laughed, but I did not get an orange." At a later moment his friend Crompton and he trespass on a farmer's land and the farmer angrily chases them: "Crompton held his hand to his ear, and said with the utmost mildness: 'Would you mind speaking a little louder? I'm rather hard of hearing.' The farmer was reduced to speechlessness in the endeavour to make more noise than he was already." Perhaps so, and indeed that may have been exactly the way it all happened, but it is worthwhile to note how, again and again, things work out so absurdly perfect, and to lay a part of this perfection to Russell's skill as a "born entertainer" who tells stories in a certain way, rather than to the inevitably comic fitness of things.

A similar remark might be made about the series of "Eureka" experiences which signal key moments in the autobiography. A Cambridge friend on "the darkest part of a winding College staircase" suddenly quotes the whole of Blake's "Tyger, Tyger" and Russell is so much affected he becomes dizzy and has to lean against the wall. Or, more famously, he returns from purchasing a very philosophical tin of tobacco, and suddenly, in the midst of Trinity Lane, throws it up in the air and exclaims "Great God in boots!—the ontological argument is sound!" Or he decides, while bicycling along a country road outside Grantchester, that he no longer loves his wife, Alys. In at least one instance the affinities of the Eureka experience with mysticism are brought to the fore: Russell has just finished the *Prin-*

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ciples of Mathematics, the 19th century has come to a close, and he and Alys are living with the Whiteheads. The Russells have been to hear Gilbert Murray read the *Hippolytus;* they return home to find Mrs. Whitehead, an invalid, in great pain. Here is Russell's commentary:

> She seemed cut off from everyone and everything by walls of agony, and the sense of the solitude of each human soul suddenly overwhelmed me. Ever since my marriage, my emotional life had been calm and superficial. I had forgotten all the deeper issues, and had been content with flippant cleverness. Suddenly the ground seemed to give way beneath me, and I found myself in quite another region. Within five minutes I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated, and that in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that.

Immediately practicing what he preaches, Russell takes the hand of Whitehead's youngest boy, age 3, leads him away, and tells us that they remained close friends until the son's death in World War I. A lively five minutes in which "some such reflections" took place, but then, the stream of thought is Bertrand Russell's, not just anybody's. Yet reading the passage, one remains strangely unaffected, unmoved by it. The comment on his marriage thus far—"I had forgotten all the deeper issues, and had been content with flippant cleverness"—is as complacent a summing-up of self as could be found in the most flippantly clever analysis. There is no suggestion in the speaking voice that Russell was or is now equipped to begin penetrating to the core of loneliness in various human beings. And Whitehead's little boy takes on qualities of a lamb sacrificed to the demands of a newfound egoistic "sympathy." Like the autobiography as a whole, the passage is of great interest, but that interest only emerges when we see around the tale-teller just a bit more than he permits himself to do. All of these Eureka experiences are both "exciting" and "entertaining" in the sense Wyndham Lewis used the terms to describe Russell's predilection for a certain side in a debate. Taken altogether the personality they compose is not one which invites us to explore its depths and rich ambiguities; its life is a superficial one, though as Eliot said with regard to Ben Jonson—the superficies is solid: "a man cannot be accused of dealing superficially with the world which he himself has created; the superficies *is* the world."

But Eliot was talking about a play; the question is whether the

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theatrical metaphor is satisfactory and acceptable as a description of an autobiographical hero's relation to those closest to him. How does the mature Bertrand Russell—the writer—deal with the reek of the human, when the particular human being in question is, for example, his first wife Alys? In 1889 he meets Alys Pearsall Smith, a student at Bryn Mawr, sister to Logan Pearsall Smith and daughter of Evangelist parents. He falls in love, and one whole glorious winter day "we spent . . . with the exception of meal-times, in kissing, with hardly a word spoken from morning till night, except for an interlude during which I read *Epipsychidion* aloud." Russell's relatives, particularly his grandmother, are deeply opposed to the proposed marriage and fill the young people with horror stories about insanity in the family and the resultant dangers of child-bearing. Despite the stories they are married in 1894; and Russell proceeds, with a candor praised by some reviewers, to tell us the facts about sex:

> She had been brought up, as American women always were in those days, to think that sex was beastly, that all women hated it, and that men's brutal lusts were the chief obstacle to happiness in marriage. She therefore thought that intercourse should only take place when children were desired. As we had decided to have no children, she had to modify her position on this point, but she still supposed that she would desire intercourse to be very rare. I did not argue the matter, and I did not find it necessary to do so.

Is the name for this "candor" or something else? The sly reader winks back at twinkling Bertie Russell, comfortably engaged in the conspiracy of knowing why he didn't find it "necessary to do so." No words needed, just a bit of the old magnetism. What happens to Alys in the process of this little triumph? She is first a type—one of those pitiable American Women back then; then has to "modify her position" on intercourse (ho-ho, we chuckle); and finally succumbs to sex, like all others of her type.

In a way the joke turns out to be on Russell, though Alys has to suffer for it. Whatever his noble thoughts were about "penetrating to the core of loneliness in each human being," penetration of any sort seems to have remained merely a thought as far as his wife was concerned during the ten-year period from 1901, when he discovers he no longer loves her and moves out of her room, to 1911 when he commences his affair with Ottoline Morrell. So a letter from Alys in 1904, printed without comment, takes on an awful pathos: "I only want to tell thee again how very much I love thee, and how glad I am of thy existence. When I could share thy life and think myself of use to thee, it was the greatest happiness anyone has ever known. . . ."

The book's tour de force is unquestionably the succession of events leading to the conquest of Lady Ottoline, and it is worth inspecting in some detail for what it crystallizes of Russell the autobiographer,

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and his earlier self. It is 1910, *Principia Mathematica* is finished, and he decides to campaign for the Liberal, Philip Morrell. At the beginning of the chapter there is an odd but strongly brought out memory associated with a house in which lived an aunt of Ottoline's—"In getting out of a carriage at her door, I fell on the pavingstones, and hurt my penis. After this I had to sit twice a day in a hot bath and sponge it carefully. As I had always hitherto been taught to ignore it, this puzzled me." The anecdote takes on piquancy as we remember that Russell has been ignoring it for the last ten years: it is unmistakably time for a change. He visits Ottoline one night when Philip is away and, Eureka, experiences an "overwhelmingly strong feeling" for her. They decide to become lovers as soon as possible, though not, for some reason, on the spot. On his way to give some lectures in Paris, Russell visits the dentist who informs him, as dentists evidently did, that he may well have cancer. (The information is ironically analogous to the insanity stories thrown up in the face of his first love.) Russell then visits Alys, dutifully tells her about Ottoline, at which, for some reason, she flies into a rage and threatens to expose both Russell and Ottoline. Russell "quietly but firmly" reveals that he will commit suicide if she does. "I meant this, and she saw that I did. Thereupon her rage became unbearable. After she had stormed for some hours, I gave a lesson in Locke's philosophy to her niece Karin Costelloe, who was about to take her Tripos. I then rode away on my bicycle, and with that my first marriage came to an end. I did not see Alys again till 1950, when we met as friendly acquaintances." And that was that. Notice how the writer, accustomed as he tells us to work at penetrating human cores of loneliness, creates this situation: a suicide threat, unbearable rage, a lesson in Locke's philosophy to a niece, a bicycle ride and the end of a marriage. Just in case the reader is wondering about that cancer, Russell enlightens us two pages later in describing the ups and downs of his relation with Ottoline; it seems to him sometimes that she is indifferent, "but this was certainly not always the case. I was suffering from pyorrhoea although I did not know it, and this caused my breath to be offensive, which also I did not know. She could not bring herself to mention it. . . ." And soon, cured of pyorrhoea, Russell is extending himself, penetrating new cores of loneliness, taking up with an unnamed "girl from Chicago" who comes back to England. ". . . I had relations with her from time to time, but the shock of the war killed my passion for her, and I broke her heart. Ultimately she fell a victim to a rare disease, which first paralysed her, and then made her insane." One thinks of Humbert Humbert's first sweetheart—"and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu," but Russell is much more deadpan in his treatment.

Or is he? Whether or not this born entertainer with a keen sense for the manifold absurdities of existence knows exactly how well he

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has succeeded in expressing these qualities in the *Autobiography* is perhaps doubtful. A few pages after the conclusion of the Ottoline escapade, we run into a letter from Joseph Conrad who, predictably, admired "A Free Man's Worship": "For the marvellous pages on the Worship of a free man the only return one can make is that of a deep admiring affection. . . ." What possible relation does this bear to the escapade we have just recently witnessed? One throws up his hands, and invokes something called Bertrand Russell as the only fiction large enough to hold together such incommensurables. The *Autobiography* contains no more human sympathy, "unbearable pity for the sufferings of mankind" or even "depths of anguish and despair" (to quote Russell's prefatory claims for himself) than does *Vile Bodies* or *Afternoon Men*. But it composes a world and a personality that are wondrously solid, at times appallingly so.

ROGER SALE

Flaubert: Why, Why *Him*?

A BOOK CALLED *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of the Themes and Techniques* is bound to seem at first glance supererogatory—surely we know about *them*.[1] But with sober and loving care Victor Brombert has written an excellent book that both justifies and transcends its method. To be sure, there is work here on windows in *Madame Bovary*, on ramparts and the penetration thereof in *Salammbô*, and on brothels in *L'Education Sentimentale;* there are chapters called "*Madame Bovary:* The Tragedy of Dreams" and "*Bouvard et Pécuchet:* The Tragicomedy of Intellect." But Brombert manages to turn all this into an account of Flaubert as a writer that is perhaps the most satisfying and compelling yet written. If his book lacks the lightning flashes of recent work on this author by Hugh Kenner and Robert Martin Adams, it does cover what they say, and with a fullness that states the case for Flaubert about as well as it ever has been.

Brombert's most characteristic quality is one he shares with his subject: a willed dispassionateness that seeks to place rather than to patronize some rather unappealing material:

Flaubert finds inspiration in his very obsession with decay.

[1] THE NOVELS OF FLAUBERT: A STUDY OF THE THEMES AND TECHNIQUES, by *Victor Brombert*. Princeton University Press. $7.50.

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> Flaubert's heroes not only have a vocation for failure, but they fail independently of any investment of fervor.
>
> *Salammbô* reads like a compendium of atrocities. Mutilation is almost the key image in the novel.
>
> Flaubert endlessly ruminates over his losses and exposes his characters to frustration and erosion. He thus seems to take an almost cruel pleasure in submitting Félicité to harassment and anguish.

By themselves these sentences might seem the work of Mario Praz and to offer only another trip through the dream-and-flesh pits of the nineteenth century. The maladies are coolly elucidated: a suicidal fear and loathing of life, boredom and self-contempt, enervating lassitude broken by fits of rutting cruelty and lapses into pale dreaming. Brombert, however, needs both the maladies and his own detachment in order to evoke an image of Flaubert whose passionate desire for objectivity was not so much the product of an aesthetic theory as it was a necessary ingredient in the expression of his most urgent needs.

Once the image is made clear, all the work falls into place. Brombert sees *bovarysme* as central throughout Flaubert's work—"it is an almost metaphysical eroticism: 'desire' in its essential form"—regardless of whether the work is a bourgeois novel or an exotic romance. *Salammbô* is thereby made more important than in previous studies of Flaubert; it is "more truly representative of the patterns of Flaubert's imagination than *Madame Bovary*." Brombert takes Schahabarim's rebuke to Salammbô: "Your desire is sacrilege. Be satisfied with the knowledge that you already possess," and comments:

> The warning corresponds to a deep-rooted Flaubertian wish—embodied by Madame Bovary, Saint Antoine, as well as Bouvard and Pécuchet—to transcend the limitations of one's being.

After a while, one sees how it is possible to take Brombert's phrases and ideas about one book and apply them to the others and to the letters. He says, for instance, of *L'Education Sentimentale,* that "we are thrust into what seems like a perpetual and slightly opaque present" in order that we may see Flaubert "obsessively concentrating on a desolation which has no precise cause." Armed with such splendid formulations, there is almost nothing about Flaubert that cannot be clarified. Because for him the present is perpetual and slightly opaque, Flaubert gives up any perspective by which he might symbolically place or illuminate a gesture, action, or landscape. Instead he must work indirectly and take his fictional materials and either repeat them and so make them into motifs, or pack them together and make them enervating catalogues. In either case the effect is to empty out energy—into desperation, as when all the windows opened

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by Emma Bovary lead onto dreary views, or into comic vacuity, as when Pécuchet tries tirelessly to make something grow in his garden.

The present makes one myopic precisely because the character cannot realize himself in his world, and this leads to "the abdication of reason in the face of a devastating multiplicity of phenomena." Brombert's final sentences on *Saint Antoine* perhaps make the case most tellingly:

> What distinguishes Flaubert's brand of pessimism is that in his private universe the very plethora of life becomes a principle of undoing, that abundance and vitality are here in the service of corruption. Others, like Hugo, welcomed the profusion of knowledge and experience as a healthy superabundance, and optimistically prophesied the progress of humanity. Flaubert sees only a choking saturation, overmeasure and superfluity. In part, this concern with excess and massive accumulation of phenomena must be related to a social and cultural diagnosis, to a denunciation of the sanguine arrogance of bourgeois society of which Flaubert felt himself simultaneously the critic and the accomplice. But to an even larger degree it does point to a form of self-denunciation, to a mythopoeic diagnosis of a private disease: the tragic combination of gigantic yearnings and a fundamental debility.

The "choking saturation" is at best a curious metaphor, but something like this is the experience of Emma, Salammbô, Frédéric Moreau, Bouvard, Pécuchet, *and* Flaubert; all but Flaubert rush into "the very plethora of life" blindly and so fail and collapse. Their author, "simultaneously the critic and the accomplice," must try to render the squalor and the poignancy of his character's situation without falling into squalid sentimentality or satire. To do this required intelligence, sensitivity and, above all, tenacity. Faced with an opaque present which yields only a desolation without a precise cause, faced with gigantic yearnings and an inability to satisfy them or even to clarify their nature, Flaubert retired to try to hold his intuitions in some impossible artistic grip. He was, thus, fighting a delaying action against himself and the motions of his culture. He could not "develop" at all in the usual sense of the word, but instead could only keep at his work, forever in need of it in order to face anything. Brombert, thus, must lay out book and theme, he must circle back and around on his subject without ever implying causal connections between the books, without falsifying Flaubert by making him into a slowly and beautifully maturing artist. Brombert's work, like Flaubert's, is the same from beginning to end, all of a piece.

One book never settles anything for ever, but it may be that after this one we will hear less about "the novel ending with Flaubert," less about the master artist, less about the rather phony set-pieces like the agricultural show in *Madame Bovary* or the close of "Saint

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Julien l'Hospitalier." Flaubert was a writer of great historical importance, but more than a century after *Madame Bovary* there should be little need to praise Flaubert because he turned the novel into Art. The moment we see Flaubert's impersonality not as the result of a secure sense of life but as a kind of lifeline to which Flaubert clung, then certain definitions and certain praise of Flaubert are no longer possible. As recently as ten years ago Quentin Anderson felt he could praise Flaubert at George Eliot's expense by saying Flaubert could "make the novel an instrument which can register the fate of a society in the perspective of history and heroic achievement." Brombert's Flaubert is lonelier than Anderson's, more driven, more like a *symboliste,* less serene or truly detached—and this is undoubtedly the more accurate portrait.

Further than this Brombert does not go, and the simplest way to indicate where he might have gone is to name two assumptions he makes but does not question: first, that Flaubert's work is of roughly even quality throughout, and second, that Flaubert is unquestionably a great novelist. Brombert allows himself the blessed indulgence of letting description serve for praise, and because his Flaubert is so clear and compelling, one is for a while scarcely moved to complain. But the moment one turns from the critic back to the novels one sees that the accuracy of Brombert's diagnosis cannot quite serve to compel assent to the greatness of the fictions. *Salammbô,* for all that it is useful to Brombert as a central Flaubertian landscape, is nearly unreadable; *Saint Antoine* and "Hérodias" are at best minor works; "Saint Julien" and *Bouvard* are "extreme" works which, by their very extremity, show Flaubert "at his best" only if that "best" is seen as being also very limited; above all, it is not yet clear why one must regard *L'Education Sentimentale* or even *Madame Bovary* as major works. Brombert offers abundant material and ammunition for those who regard Flaubert as a rather special writer, yet he himself is unwilling to see him as anything less than central.

Hugh Kenner sees the problem very clearly when he isolates Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett as comedians of the printed page for whom the sentence rather than the character or the event is the unit of attention. To these three he opposes Dostoyevski, George Eliot, Tolstoi, and Lawrence, writers in the Great Tradition. Writing for the "comedians" is highly conscious and difficult labor from which one receives no release. Lawrence despised such writers because he sensed in them a will to be stronger or greater than the life they created. In different ways Kenner and Brombert are willing to agree with Lawrence's diagnosis, but they are unwilling to conclude that the result in a case like Flaubert's is bad or minor art. Brombert, I think, would feel that to throw out Flaubert on Lawrencian grounds would be to dismiss an enormous amount of literature written in the last century, and he is very good at showing the ways Flaubert in *L'Edu-*

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cation Sentimentale works towards an anti-narrative form that illuminates the path Sartre and the writers of the *nouveau roman* were to take. But, again, historical importance is not the same thing as greatness, and *L'Education* seems to me most definitely not a great novel.

It is, however, the book in which Flaubert does most thoroughly what he always does, and it is for that reason the novel most admired by Flaubertians. He set himself the task of rendering the lives of people fundamentally dumb, and for whom life held no story, only impulse and drift. To do this he gave himself up to an almost complete refusal to shape the shapeless or to control the uncontrollable. Flaubert shows the emptiness of Moreau's life without once offering a personal gesture of admiration or disgust. We understand the willed inaccessibility of Mme. Arnoux, the sterility of Rosanette, the irrelevance of Louise Roque, the flabbiness of the reformers, the hypocrisy of Deslauriers, and all this is done without the traditional techniques of narrative art. Yet of the result Henry James said:

> He takes Frédéric Moreau on the threshold of life and conducts him to the extreme of maturity without apparently suspecting for a moment either our wonder or our protest—"Why, why *him?*" Frédéric is positively too poor for his part, too scant for his charge; and we feel with a kind of embarrassment, certainly with a kind of compassion, that it is somehow the business of a protagonist to prevent in his designer an excessive waste of faith.

Brombert quotes part of this, but apparently finds it irrelevant, the result of old-fashioned literary expectations. Yet one need be no Jamesian to know what is wrong with *L'Education*. Characters are not required to be interesting "as people," and lives need not be full and rich in order to be accessible literary subjects. But the point about pointlessness is, after all, rather easily made, and *L'Education* is overblown and much, much too long. In his patient care not to realize, not to focus, not to grant "falsifying" perspectives, Flaubert is driven to a kind of gigantism. The alternative method does not have to be the fanciness of "The Beast in the Jungle"; one need look no further than *"Un Coeur Simple"* to see some possibilities for doing the kind of thing Flaubert attempts in *L'Education*. The short story works because the absence of a precise cause for Félicité's desolation is irrelevant, and the perpetual and slightly opaque present is one in which Félicité herself barely shares, having little consciousness on which it can be registered. Moreau is no more interesting and his ability to grasp his experience is no greater, but Flaubert, merely by going on and on about his unspectacular career, implies that he does matter much more. *"Un Coeur Simple" is* a laboratory piece too, but its unpretentiousness is not at odds with its synthetic quality, whereas both the whole effort to make Moreau part of a generation and the satiric insistence on the folly and wickedness of political and social

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action constantly make *L'Education* into a big novel, massive, inert, committed to demonstrating its rather simple self over and over. The form imitates the life and times of the central characters, and it can finally delight only those who enjoy noting the completeness with which the imitation is rendered.

Both *Bouvard* and *Madame Bovary* are "less characteristic" of their author, yet in different ways they provide perspectives from which one can see the folly of *L'Education Sentimentale*. *Bouvard* seems to be even guiltier than *L'Education* of the charge of endlessness—horticulture, literature, religion, education, one damned thing after another, but it is better because one can so obviously take it or leave it alone. Reading *Bouvard* is like eating a box of chocolates, and one can stop after any chapter and say "Enough" without feeling he has slighted the book. It can go on as long as Flaubert wants to invent—it is not so much unfinished as unfinishable. To think of it as major art seems preposterous, but at least turning the page does not bring us back to the same thing. Instead we can wonder, as one does with a comic strip, what our heroes are up to now.

But *Bouvard* is outrageous sport, and finally it is *Madame Bovary* on which claims for Flaubert must rest. James complained about Emma Bovary that she is "really too small of an affair," which may well seem true if we think of Emma Woodhouse, Anna Karenina, or Ursula Brangwen, but Madame Bovary is large indeed when compared with Frédéric Moreau precisely because Flaubert cares so much more about her, and because he is so determined to make her matter. Moreau may express many of Flaubert's feelings about life, but he is a terrible bore precisely because those feelings have no edge on them, because the longings—"desire" in its essential form—are not more than minimally registered on Moreau's consciousness. One is tempted to say that *Madame Bovary* succeeds because in it Flaubert has not yet discovered what he most wants to do. Perhaps the greatest moment in all the works—and fortunately it is one almost everyone agrees is great—is also very uncharacteristic: the comment on Rodolphe's growing boredom with Emma's increasingly desperate passion:

> Emma was like all his other mistresses; and as the charm of novelty gradually slipped from her like a piece of her clothing, he saw revealed in all its nakedness the eternal monotony of passion, which always assumes the same forms and always speaks the same language. He had no perception—this man of such vast experience—of the dissimilarity of feeling that might underlie similarities of expression. Since he had heard those same words spoken by loose women or prostitutes, he had little belief in their sincerity when he heard them now: the more flowery a person's speech, he thought, the more suspect the feelings, or lack of feelings, it concealed. Whereas the truth is that fullness of soul can sometimes overflow in utter rapidity of language, for none of us can ever express the exact measure of his needs or his thoughts or his sorrows;

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> and human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars.[2]

If this Emma is "too small an affair," then so are we all; the passage wonderfully places us as it places her.

Yet it seems like something by George Eliot; it has her very subtle fullness that wisely and ironically sees us as unique and also as repositories of common humanity, and because it has this quality, it removes us from the tightly willed effort to render without comment that pervades most of the rest of the novel. It is an elegy for Emma and also an apology from Flaubert, for if Emma's words can only tap crude rhythms then Flaubert himself must tap almost the same rhythms—unless he adopts, as he does here, a perspective totally different from his heroine's. But too often Flaubert seems repelled or mistrustful of his compassion for Emma Bovary, and so backs off into the gauche artiness of the novel's opening or the coach ride with Leon or the blind beggar. It is only rarely that he allows himself the direct lyric expression of passages like the one above or even clear narrative shaping like the section in the third part which counterpoints Emma's sexual and financial desperation. Flaubert *is* working towards a different kind of novel, in *Madame Bovary* and increasingly from then on, but when he is at his best he is a traditional novelist. Perhaps the best evidence of this is not in the novels at all, but the letters. Gide said they were worth more than the novels, and even if that is an overstatement, it does show how much Flaubert willingly gave up in order to write the kind of novel he wanted. For the letters are filled with what is in some of *Madame Bovary* but is so missing from *Salammbô* and *L'Education Sentimentale:* strong, passionate, extremely intelligent directness.

Because Flaubert is, as Victor Brombert has so abundantly shown, a special case, one need not conclude from this that the direction Flaubert helped to take the novel was not worth taking. But perhaps it can be said that the passion for indirectness, for controlling one's art tightly because life is otherwise impossible, is one that in itself creates only palaces of art, less interesting the closer it comes to total control. *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are both books which became less good with each revision because those revisions brought their authors closer to perfect form and lifeless expression. "Flaubert finds inspiration in his very obsession with decay," says Brombert, and rightly, but in order to control such an inspiration at all Flaubert had to control it tightly, and the tighter the control, the more strenuously wrong the result. It is easier, especially with Brombert's book in hand, to feel compassion and admiration for Flaubert's effort than it is to assent to the artistic results. What we can see now is why it could not have been otherwise.

[2] Translation by Francis Steegmuller, *Madame Bovary* (Random House, 1957), pp. 215-216.

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MARIUS BEWLEY

Poetry Chronicle

MR. BERRYMAN'S TWO VOLUMES OF POETRY, *Homage of Mistress Bradstreet* and *Dream Poems*—the latter still in progress—have brought him to the attention of critics as one of the more serious American poets now writing. With the mature, the "major" Berryman, these comments will not be much concerned since they are occasioned by the appearance of *Berryman's Sonnets,* written some time in the forties but now published for the first time.[1] When a poet who in the past has not been enthusiastically taken up or publicized begins to move forward with a certain emphasis and deliberation, an acclamatory reflex on the part of critics and literary journalists often leads to overcompensatory praise in which earlier indifference is supposedly redeemed by appreciative gullibility. There have been several indications that *Berryman's Sonnets* are about to benefit gratuitously from a warm overflow of critical enthusiasm somewhat belatedly directed towards his last two volumes. It may therefore be a matter of some interest to look rather closely at several of the earlier sonnets in an effort to determine just how seriously as poetry they should be taken.

The subject of this sequence of 115 sonnets is supposed to be an affair with a young woman named Lise. But though Lise is endlessly talked about she never exists as a palpable reality *within* the sonnets. She is as little tangible as a blonde smoke drifting across a verbal landscape. The occasion for these sonnets has little to do with Lise: their language, images, and literary allusions make their own occasions.

Mr. Berryman of course is perfectly aware of this, and content. Sonnet 16 is fairly representative of these poems at their most accessible:

> Thrice, or I moved to sack, I saw you: how
> Without siege laid I can as simply tell
> As whether below the dreams of Astrophel
> Lurks local truth some scholars would allow
> And others will deny in ours! O now
> The punishing girl met after Toynbee's bell
> Tolled for us all I see too bloody well
> To say why then I cheapened a blind bow.

Stella, whether in life or Sidney's language, is indeed a solid presence beside Lise. We might take a preliminary glance here at Berry-

[1] BERRYMAN'S SONNETS, by *John Berryman.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $4.95.

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man's mannerisms in the last four lines of the octave, which are characteristic of the entire sequence. After only twenty years or so the reference to Toynbee's tolling bell seems curiously dating in effect, while the poet's regretted vulnerability in the last line to blind Cupid's random arrows suggests a development in the affair—a rise and a decline—that is nowhere effectively presented. That word "bloody," framed between two lines of some literary pretension, may contain a retrospective reference to the violence of the poet's "sack" of Lise referred to in the first line, but it is probably only rather a coy use of the profane British intensive. In this context it strikes my ear as all *discordia* and no *concors*.

Mr. Berryman is notoriously a literary poet, which is fine: but his use of other literature in this volume is often too self-conscious to permit its effective assimilation into the experience out of which he writes his own poetry. In sonnet 73 he causes himself to be strapped down to Kafka's penal machine. The harrow is lowered, and "I FELL IN LOVE" and "I MET MY SOUL" is needled on his flesh. A witty conceit no doubt, but as unconvincing as most verses written for an evening's entertainment in a fashionably erudite drawing room. Sonnet 15 is a straightforward rewriting of Sir Thomas Wyatt's translation of Petrarch's 189th sonnet: "The Lover Compareth His State to a Ship in Perilous Storm Tossed on the Sea." I believe one reviewer singled this out for particular praise, but going back to Wyatt's poem one is only made aware of what a falling off occurs in Berryman's version. Since Wyatt's version is a triumphant success in its particular mode, the falling off might easily be condoned if Mr. Berryman were experimenting with language or attempting a technical innovation of some kind. But sonnet 15 is in language and imagery the most thoroughly conventional of the whole sequence—is in fact nothing but a verse paraphrase of Wyatt, in originality of language scarcely beyond what any competent poet of the past fifty years might have done. I found it difficult to imagine why Mr. Berryman had thought it worthwhile to include this sonnet in his volume until I came to sonnet 25:

> Sometimes the night echoes to prideless wailing
> Low as I hunch home late and fever-tired,
> Near you not, nearing the sharer I desired,
> Toward whom till now I sailed back; but that sailing
> Yaws, from the cabin orders like a failing
> Dribble, the stores disordered and then fired
> Skid wild, the men are glaring, the mate has wired
> *Hopeless:* locked in, and humming, the Captain's nailing
> A false log to the lurching table. Lies
> And passion sing in the cabin on the voyage home,
> The burgee should fly Jolly Roger: win
> Madness like the tackle of a crane (outcries

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Ascend) around to heave him from the foam
Irresponsible, since all the stars rain blind.

It seems probable that Mr. Berryman wished to introduce Wyatt's (and Petrarch's) exquisitely developed nautical metaphor into his sequence for the sake of grafting his own privately cultivated hybrid onto the base stock. But it doesn't work. The proliferation of nautical metaphors quickly gets out of hand and strangles the parent stem. Instead of Wyatt's superbly controlled and evocative images which illuminate the lover's state, we are given the circumstantial details of a near sea disaster which never surmount their own noise and confusion.

It was no doubt inevitable that any intellectual poet writing in the forties should have been influenced by Donne, and it is interesting to observe how Mr. Berryman uses that influence. I should guess that the ultimate model for sonnet 44 was "The Canonization," in which the lover-poet tells an unsympathetic listener he is willing to let the world go its own way, "So you will let me love." Complacently contemplating the splendors of his affair, the lover-poet concludes with the adjuration:

Countries, towns, courts: beg from above
A pattern for your love.

Sonnet 44 runs the same course. In his opening two stanzas Donne gave a concrete, compressed and vivid impression of the busyness of everyday Jacobean England on which the lover turns his back. Here is the somewhat blotted but overwrought picture of our post-World War II world on which Mr. Berryman's lover-poet turns *his* back. The immediacy, strength, and clarity of Donne's images is replaced by an ambition of rigor and force that because it never gets into focus ends in dispersal:

Bell to sore knees vestigial crowds, let crush
One another nations sottish and a-prowl,
Talon the Norway rat to a barn owl
At soft-wind midnight; split the sleepy hush
With sirens; card hells create; from a tower push
The frantic hesitator; strike a rowel
To a sad nag; probe, while they whiten & howl,
With rubber gloves the prisoners' genial slush.

In the displaced syntax, violent compressions, inversions, nouns used as verbs, and deliberate obscurities where none need be, the gesturing is clearly in Donne's direction, but surely the effect is totally unlike. The matter of this octave is not difficult, but every line raises questions to which several possible answers (except in the case of the wholly obscure last two lines) could be supplied, each one of which would be as good as the others. This kind of uncontrolled

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ambivalence should not be confused with poised ambiguities. Why are the crowds vestigial? Because they have been decimated in the war perhaps? Or is the bell a sacring bell addressing itself to the last sad few remnants of the prayerful (which would explain their sore knees)? If so, what relation is intended between this pious minority and the sottish nations a-prowl? Is there some precise reference in the third line, or is Mr. Berryman only suggesting that the stupendous bloodletting of the twentieth century should be reduced to a meaningless savage encounter between the domestic rat and the common barnyard owl? One would have thought that "talon" used as a verb would have been an activity of the owl's, but here it is not (*whose* activity is not clear). In any case, does "talon" used as a verb at this point infuse something of a Donne's or a Hopkins' strength into the line, or is it merely a usage derived from those masters but now declined into a tic of fashionable writing of the forties? The twentieth century has experienced a hell wholly real, nor have its devils been painted ones. It is neither accurate nor just to describe that experience as "card-hells." But by this time Hubbub and Clash have taken over, and the remaining images plummet with the "frantic hesitator" into imaginative imprecision. One wonders if the octave as a whole is intended as an objective picture of our world (probably), or is it the world seen through the lover's distorting eyes? The sestet raises similar questions, and as I have already said, ends like "The Canonization" as the lover-poet asks "my beloved and me" to

> Days, deer-fleet years, . . . be a paradigm
> For runaways and the régime's exiles.

Like Pound of the *Cantos* whom he admires, Mr. Berryman is fond of historical allusions—particularly allusions to literary history. Here is the sestet of sonnet 28:

> After eighteen years of the Rue Fortunée
> Balzac brought Hanska, the Count dead and the lover
> Not well to live, home, where the black lock stuck
> Stuck! stuck! lights blazed, the crazy valet smashed away,
> Idlers assembled, a smith ran to discover—
> Ten weeks, and then turned in (like mine) his luck.

I do not know precisely *when* in the forties this sonnet was composed, but I should be surprised to learn that it was written before Stefan Zweig's popular biography of Balzac appeared in 1946 in which the following paragraph describing Balzac's arrival at his house in the Rue Fortunée occurs:

> The house was brightly illuminated from roof to basement. Balzac rang the bell, but no one came to the door. Again and again he tore at the bell, but the house remained silent behind the blazing

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> windows. A few neighbors began to gather round, and Balzac asked questions which none of them could answer. His wife [Hanska] remained seated in the carriage while the coachman hurried off to fetch a locksmith. When the door was eventually broken open a macabre scene met his eyes. François, his servant, was crouching in one of the rooms—stark mad.

If sonnet 28 really is based on this passage, then Mr. Berryman's use of his sources is superficially like Pound's in the *Cantos*. But the plan and "organization" of that vast work permits such fragments, juxtaposed against each other, to build up towards significant thematic developments and contrasts which are impossible in a narrative sonnet sequence. The Balzac-Hanska episode can only have meaning here if it illuminates in some way the affair with Lise, but so far as I can see it does not: perhaps because Lise is, after all, mainly an excuse for talking about Hanska, among so many other things. Nor is the episode as memorably presented in Mr. Berryman's verse as it is in Zweig's prose.

Berryman's Sonnets is unmistakably verse of its decade growing out of the thirties, and it is much to be regretted that it was not published when it was written rather than now. It has the intellectual prickliness of Denis Devlin, the allusiveness of Ronald Bottrall, and some of the forties camp of Dunstan Thompson which, in Berryman's case, sometimes swings dangerously close to sentimentality. Any final judgment must place the book in relation to Mr. Berryman's later and much better volumes, particularly *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, published in 1956. Although difficult to like, this is certainly one of the better American poems of the fifties. Large and subtle in conception, it contemporizes the literary and historical past in an imaginative dimension not yet dreamed of in the Balzac-Hanska episode. I am not sure whether *Homage* shows us Berryman escaping from or personally assimilating the borrowed gestures, affections, and eccentricities of the sonnets, but in either case the present volume leads towards a surer understanding of the positive achievement which, when the sonnets were written, was still some years in the future.

Richard Eberhart's *Thirty One Sonnets*[2] are now, as he tells us, published for the first time thirty-five years after they were written, which would place their date of composition in the late thirties. The sonnets are reasonably pleasant and youthfully ambitious in rather an innocent, winning way. But it is unusual to retain this kind of innocence to twenty-eight, which is more or less the age at which Mr. Eberhart wrote them. Moreover he shows too much of the progenitor's partiality when he speaks in "A Note to the Reader" of "the uniqueness of their energy and passionate flow." One mentions them

[2] THIRTY ONE SONNETS, by *Richard Eberhart*. The Eakins Press. $4.95.

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briefly here mainly because of the arresting contrast they provide with *Berryman's Sonnets.* The aspiration in this uncompleted sequence (the youthful Eberhart had contemplated a goal of 100 sonnets but apparently lacked Mr. Berryman's resolution) is neither towards Donne nor the hacking out of a distinctively modern poetic speech: Eberhart's Chase has a Shakespeare in view—the Shakespeare of the Sonnets. It is no doubt to the credit of the performance that it is Shakespeare the reader keeps being reminded of, not any of the Victorians who can so easily crop up as rival poets on occasions like this. Only very occasionally does the younger Mr. Eberhart escape the intonations and inflections of his model to give us a line or two that seems personal and original, as in this amusing simile of quite Beatrix Potter freshness in which the poet contemplates his weakling but successful rival in bed with his former mistress:

> His lips will nibble at your breasts' such points,
> Like rabbits the new lettuce leaves of spring.

When Mr. Eberhart switches to heavier rhetoric, drawing in a vague way I suppose on the plays rather than the Sonnets, the result is predictably a failure:

> This is your marriage night, and I with you
> Will couple in the skies far out of sight,
> On the cold bed of resolute death, true
> To the trammels told in the fleshly plight.
> Tumults do your worst, and put me low;
> Lower than the worms fuming in the ground.

This is rhetoric whose first function is to fume, like those remarkable earthworms in the last line, and it is unwise to question meaning too strictly here. But it would be heavy-handed and inappropriate to press criticism of this little book very rigorously. Mr. Eberhart has quite understandably yielded to the desire to see in print these youthful sonnets for which he retains a certain affection, and the reasons he gives in "A Note to the Reader" are wholly legitimate. Neither has fondness blinded him to their radical shortcomings, for he now considers them models of "how not to write sonnets." Their interest for us in our context lies in the way they indicate so clearly, when placed by *Berryman's Sonnets,* the extensive risks any poet must run who undertakes to write in the twentieth century in this form.

In later life Wordsworth regretted that in writing sonnets he had wasted so much time that might have been better employed. As Wordsworth is one of the very few English poets since the Renaissance who have achieved a few momentous triumphs in the form, one can't share his regret; but in making the observation he was on to a critical truth. Ideally, the sonnet makes announcements. It is proclamatory rather than exploratory, and like the herald's, its most

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becoming dress is the formalistic tabard. One need look no further abroad than Hopkins' great sonnets to recognize there are stunning exceptions to this rather rash generalization; but in English at least the exceptions do not represent a continuous tradition—they invariably have something of the *tour de force* about them. The reasons are fairly obvious. It has been a very long time since the world has felt it could announce *anything* with much confidence. An encapsulating metrical form like the sonnet, which flourishes best where the discoveries have already been made and the values already established, will necessarily have diminished relevance in a neurotically tentative society; nor will the language of such a society be readily adaptable to the guarantees and securities which such a form rightly stipulates. Mr. Eberhart's and Mr. Berryman's sonnets between them represent two extremities of danger. The bold experimental "modernity" of Mr. Berryman's language often seems the wrong dress in the wrong place, and his sonnets conceal embarrassment by unappealing assertiveness. On the other hand, in sending his sonnets to the costumier Mr. Eberhart took a much more unpromising (even if less exasperating) direction—indeed a fatal direction as he now recognizes. However, the situation is not hopeless, and our next poet will show us how contemporary speech can on occasion satisfy the exacting requirements of the sonnet form.

Describing the technical innovations in poetry of his contemporaries, C. Day Lewis in *A Hope for Poetry,* published in 1934, wrote: "Poets have gone back to old grammatical usages, and have taken new grammatical licenses. We notice, for example, the omission of the relative pronoun and the article, the qualification of nouns by adverbs, the transposition of the adjective, inversion, and the frequent employment of elliptic constructions." Rather oddly, this description applies much better to *Berryman's Sonnets,* written ten or fifteen years later, than to any of C. Day Lewis's verse, early or late. While Lewis's poetry offers occasional examples of all the "modern" characteristics he enumerates, the general impression his verse leaves is of a surface unruffled and rather bland. Now sixty-three years of age, Lewis has had a distinguished career, including the Oxford Professorship of Poetry. His reputation as a poet has been substantial in influential circles for decades—since the days when T. E. Lawrence enthusiastically recommended his first volume, published in 1929, to Winston Churchill. Yet it is still very difficult to make an accurate critical assessment of that reputation.

Of the several young poets who began from Oxford and who, during the thirties, more or less recognized Auden as literary shepherd, C. Day Lewis has seemed in his poetry the most anonymous. The recent publication of Louis MacNeice's *Collected Poems* of 550 pages convinced one that however tedious he might be for inter-

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minable stretches, a sharply distinct and often very attractive literary personality was responsible for the volume. Reading Lewis's *Selected Poems*,[3] which is only 160 pages, one is often aware of moral character behind the lines—more rarely of a clearly legible personality.

Critics unsympathetic to the group of which Lewis formed a part in the thirties have accused him of having no rhythm, indeed of not being a poet at all. Lewis is manifestly a poet even though his performance in that role is often unexcitingly mild. Here and there one may find a short passage that is poetry mainly by grace of the typography, but his verse unmistakably has the movement of poetry (it is not a question of metre) rather than of prose. Here are the first and last stanzas of an early poem:

> Beauty's end is in sight,
> Terminus where all feather joys alight.
> Wings that flew lightly
> Fold and are iron. We see
> The thin end of mortality.
>
> What life may now decide
> Is past the clutch of caution, the range of pride.
> Speaking from the snow
> The crocus lets me know
> That there is life to come, and go.

These are good lines, especially the last three. In fact they are so good one is startled not to respond a little more warmly. But the separate excellences are marshalled by intelligence and judgment rather than animated by any personal life or vision. The lines are certainly not dead, but as with so much of Lewis's earlier verse, the animation seeems suspended.

Lewis's later poetry is much better. Having long since abandoned the abstract social concerns of his Communist decade, his poetry has become more humanized. The individual person counts for more in the later verse, and consequently his more recent volumes carry a greater weight of *felt* experience. Concomitantly, his language seems to me to have acquired an unobtrusive assurance lacking earlier. It is rarely brilliant, but it knows its tasks and performs them with precision and economy. Since we have had so much to say about sonnets, we might look at the second in a sequence of nine called "Moods of Love," published in 1957:

> Think of his transformations; thirsty babe,
> Secret companion, devil, confidante,
> Lapdog and sphinx—each hides that king whose orb
> Is the whole earth grasped in a bare "I want."
> Redder the rose for him, sadder the fall,

[3] SELECTED POEMS, by *C. Day Lewis*. Harper & Row. $5.00.

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Who swells a trivial word into a portent,
Turns dust to diamond, shows the bantam tall,
The giant weak: nevertheless, most potent
When he comes back insidious and subdued
As an old jailbird begging one more chance.
Whether you trust him then, or look askance,
Or slam the door, at least don't act the prude:
He's what you've made of him: plausible, lewd
Or tough, he's your flesh—was a pure child once.

I doubt if the successive onion-layers of self that make up our finally indivisible identity have ever been better described in poetry. We have here a subtle and complex insight quietly but firmly stated in contemporary speech that is equally remote from the fanfares and neuroses of "modernity" exhibited in Mr. Berryman's sonnets, and the faded, cherished nostalgias of Mr. Eberhart's language. This is unmistakably speech of the twentieth century, but it is normative rather than experimental in its mode. Although the subject of the sonnet is the *process* of identity, the poet has resisted the temptation (and few contemporary poets would have done so) to immerse his sonnet in the dynamic activities of the process itself. By taking a retrospective view of the process from a stationary point he is able to retain the annunciatory character of the sonnet form without crystallizing or freezing the essentially fluxile, shifting character of his recognitions and experience.

With several noteworthy exceptions The Oxford Books of Verse have for many years maintained an unusual level of excellence. The best ones have been those like the seventeenth century volume or F. O. Matthiessen's selection of American poetry in which the particular period or literature is, for various reasons, peculiarly amenable to anthological treatment. These conditions are likely to exist when the body of work drawn on is reasonably compact and sufficiently homogeneous in character to reflect centrally basic patterns and continuities, yet broad enough in inspiration and practice to escape monotony and repetition. Quality of course is the prime factor. It was on this shoal that the eighteenth century Oxford book, after the brilliant Augustan decades, foundered. John MacQueen and Tom Scott have been singularly fortunate in their material. *The Oxford Book of Scottish Verse* is a valuable and highly readable anthology, and it has been badly needed for a long time.[4] Serious readers of English poetry are fully aware there is a brilliant tradition of Scottish verse stretching far beyond the fifteenth century, but because of the difficulties presented by the language it is not widely read. But even in the case of Middle Scots, which is the period of finest flowering,

[4] THE OXFORD BOOK OF SCOTTISH VERSE, chosen by *John MacQueen* and *Tom Scott*. $10.50.

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the language barrier is not especially formidable. Anyone who has ever had an adequate college course in Middle English, or even in Chaucer, will not have to struggle long or hard to read these poems with pleasure, and a little effort rarely pays off more richly.

The fifteenth century is traditionally called the Golden Age of Scottish poetry. MacQueen and Scott devote about 150 pages to the period, and here the major choices virtually make themselves. There are substantial excerpts from the medieval dream-allegory, *The Kingis Quair,* or King's Book by James I, the gifted Scottish King who, returning from a long but not unhappy imprisonment in England, introduced Chaucer to his countrymen with such fruitful results. Henryson's *The Testament of Cressid* is given entire—that remarkable continuation of Chaucer's narrative in which Cressid, divinely punished with leprosy for her sexual transgressions, encounters Troilus while she is begging alms. Henryson's very moving description indicates the quality and sophistication this tradition had achieved in the fifteenth century:

> Than upon him scho kest up baith hir Ene,
> And with ane blenk it come into his thocht,
> That he sumtime hir face befoir had sene.
> Bot scho was in sic plye he knew hir nocht;
> Yit than hir luik into his mynd it brocht
> The sweit visage and amorous blenking
> Of fair Cresseid sumtyme his awin darling.

There is a good and copious selection from the central poet of the school, William Dunbar, including all of *The Goldyn Targe;* two of the best of the original prologues with which Gavin Douglas prefaced each book of his translation of the *Aeneid,* so greatly admired in our day by C. S. Lewis; and there are 16 Scottish ballads from the 180 or so known to exist. But one cannot go on enumerating the inclusions which are both surprisingly comprehensive for a volume of only some 600 pages, and also discreetly discriminating. As the editors progress towards the present there is inevitably larger opportunity for disagreement with particular choices, but they are certainly right to give only token representation to such Scottish poets as William Drummond, James Thomson, and Byron, who were really in the English tradition. Even the selections from Walter Scott are handled tactfully for a Scottish anthology, and there is nothing at all—thank God!—from MacPherson's Ossian.

Since Burns and the eighteenth century there has been a tendency to look on Scottish poetry as rustic, but in the overall view this is certainly not true. The poetry of the great period was essentially court poetry, self-consciously literary, highly technical, and radically influenced by foreign models. But Scottish English seems always to have had a strength and raciness that was able to assimilate any

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influence or imported sophistications into native sinew. And it is well to bear in mind that some of Scotland's most vigorous rustic poetry was written not by a peasant or a ploughboy poet, but by a highly cultivated Scottish king. It was probably James V early in the sixteenth century who wrote "Christ's Kirk on the Green," an energetic roistering account of a brawl at a village festival. The rollicking country humour and crude animal energy may be rustic, but royalty is at the source (the rival claimant to authorship is King James I, who wrote the courtly allegory *The Kingis Quair*). The following stanza describing the Scottish lasses in their holiday dress comes before the lustier account of the brawling, but it suggests the robust life and lyrical toughness with which these Scots poets (even when crowned) have habitually responded to life on the level where ordinary men live it:

To dance the damisallis thame dicht,
And lassis licht of laittis;
Thair gluvis war of the raffell richt;
Thair schone war of the straitis:
Thair kirtillis war of the lincum licht
Weill prest with mony plaitis.
Thay war so nyce quhen men tham nicht
Thay squeild lyk ony gaitis,
Ful loud
At Chrystis kirk on the grene.[5]

About the same time King James of Scotland was writing "Christ's Kirk" Henry VIII in the south was composing his own elegantly graceful songs:

When I remember me
  Of your most gentle mind,
It may in no wise agree
  That I should be unkind.

Tudor accomplishment in this kind of courtly lyric is to be commended, but one cannot help reflecting that if King Henry had possessed the ripe humanity and humour to write "Christ's Kirk on the Green" his uneasy queens might have trusted his kindness more.

Although far more sophisticated, and possessing a satiric dimension and a power of realistic description all its own, Robert Burns's great poem "The Holy Fair" is unmistakably in a line stemming from, or running through, "Christ's Kirk," and certainly it is far less "rustic" than the robust poem of his royal predecessor. The omission of "The Holy Fair" from MacQueen and Scott's selections is the one I regret

[5] *dicht:* got ready *licht of laittis:* light of manners *gluvis:* gloves *raffell:* roe-skin *schome:* shoes *straitis:* Moroccan leather *lincum:* Lincoln green *plaitis:* pleats *nicht:* neared *gaitis: goats*

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most of all. One could easily have spared a handful of the songs, or "Death and Doctor Hornbook," or "To William Simpson, Ochiltree," for this satiric masterpiece. There is no better Burns than this.

The last 150 pages are devoted to twentieth-century poetry. This poetry seems in sensibility and motivation more markedly continuous with the past than is the case with English poetry viewed over a comparable span of time, thus giving an impression of compactness and homogeneity to the volume as a whole; but doubtless this impression arises in part from the fact that the majority of inclusions are still being written in Scottish English. Edwin Muir is one of the few who write in standard English, but his poetry is not the less Scottish for that. One of the most attractive poets of his time, one regrets that he has not been given a larger representation at someone else's expense. His late poem "Horses," in which, after the atomic destruction of civilization, a herd of wild horses approaches the last apathetic survivors and waits patiently with bowed necks to be harnessed to ploughs and begin the world anew, I believe is one of the most deeply felt and moving poems of our time. But to complain of its omission is to encroach unduly on editorial prerogative. For compensation, the editors have included Muir's "Transfiguration," surely one of the great poems of religious vision in our literature, whether of the Scottish or the English branch.

The selections from Hugh MacDiarmid are still more disappointing, though in the space available to the anthologists it would be difficult to know what to do. Nothing can cause more anguish on these occasions than poets who are as long-winded as they are excellent. Hugh MacDiarmid is Scotland's foremost living poet, and reading his *Collected Poems* persuades one he would approach major stature in any literary tradition.[6] It is rarely one meets with so active a critical intelligence, with a moral sensibility so sharply focused on language, literature, politics and society—the whole finding expression in rhythms of unusual drive and vitality, and in humour so blessedly secure it can relax in the Music Hall:

> I kent a Terrier in a sham fecht aince,
> Wha louped a dyke and landed on a thistle.
> He'd naething on ava aneth his kilt.
> Schönberg has nae notation for his whistle.

Although MacDiarmid, particularly in his later work, has sometimes written in standard English, his best work requires an extensive glossary if English and American readers are to find it intelligible. This raises an important question. Is it possible to write work of primary importance in a language which (one assumes) is no longer drawing nourishment from its society at large? Although personally

[6] COLLECTED POEMS OF HUGH MACDIARMID. Revised Edition with Enlarged Glossary Prepared by John C. Weston. Macmillan. $7.95.

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I find Mr. MacDiarmid's Scottish English much more accessible to me—and certainly more healthfully living—than the American English of *Berryman's Sonnets,* the question proposed is one that could only be answered by a critic intimately familiar at firsthand with contemporary Scottish speech and society. On the answer, I suppose, rests Mr. MacDiarmid's ultimate reputation as a poet—but I trust the answer will be favourable. Of his creative ability, large intelligence, and forceful literary personality there can be no question at all.

Clearly, it would be difficult to select representative poems from MacDiarmid's work for inclusion in an anthology. The important ones often seem to run together—their focus is too broad for neat excerption. MacQueen and Scott have chosen as their central, most imposing piece a long poem, "The Great Wheel," which appears almost at the end of the volume, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.* This is a conventionally "brilliant," rather pyrotechnical piece of work, which suffers a little from being taken from context. The Great Wheel is of course Plato's, and Yeats may be mediator. But "Second Hymn to Lenin," published in 1935, is a better poem, and a shorter. It reflects MacDiarmid's profound questioning of his own role as a civilizing poet in a world of the radically underprivileged where politics and social reform seem to promise more than any poet can to those who suffer hunger and despair. It is a poem of noble questioning that only a man of the most sensitive literary intelligence and social conscience could have written. Compare it with the Communist poems of Mr. C. Day Lewis written in those days and one will never again be tempted to generalize about political commitments to the Left in the thirties.

The format of the Oxford Books of Verse is not designed to carry a heavy editorial apparatus, and in the present instance this must have caused the editors some slight difficulty. Scottish words are glossed at the bottom of each page—a practice which, though it involves some repetition, is far more convenient for the reader than to be constantly turning back to a glossary. No doubt space was an urgent consideration, but the fact remains that for the non-professional reader many of the poems, particularly in the first half of the book, are too meagrely glossed for comfort. Nevertheless, this is an excellent book—a book to be really grateful for—and it is not at all to the disparagement of Mr. MacQueen and Mr. Scott as editors to say that nothing less than a genius for disaster would be required to compile a bad anthology from so splendid and so beautiful a body of literature.

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LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

The Worldly Mystic

THE PERSONA IN JAMES DICKEY'S NEW POEMS, those that appear in the final section ("Falling") of his new book,[1] is a unique human personality. He is a worldly mystic. On the one hand, a joyous expansive personality—all candor, laughter and charm—in love with his fully conscious gestures, the grace and surety of moves of his body. An outgoing man. An extrovert. On the other hand, a chosen man. A man who has been picked by some mysterious intelligent agent in the universe to act out a secret destiny:

> . . . something was given a life-
> mission to say to me hungrily over
>
> And over and over *your moves are exactly right*
> *For a few things in this world: we know you*
> *When you come, Green Eyes, Green Eyes.*
> (from "Encounter in the Cage Country")

How does a man re-connect with common unchosen humanity when he has just returned from the abyss of nonhuman chosen otherness? That is the chief problem to which the final volume addresses itself. How to be a man who feels perfectly at home, and at his ease, in both worlds—the inner and outer. A man who can make of himself and his art a medium, a perfect conductor, through which the opposed worlds—both charged with intensity—can meet and connect, flow into each other. The worldly mystic. It is the vision of a man who for years has been just as committed to developing his potential for creative existence as for creative art. All discoveries and earnings, spiritual or worldly, must carry over from one universe to the other.

In the best poems of the previous volume, *Buckdancer's Choice*, the self is frustrated, paralysed, helplessly unable to establish liberating connections with the world. The chief obstacle to self-liberation is a sense of moral guilt. In "The Firebombing," "The Fiend," and "Slave Quarters," the self is pitilessly subjected to encounters with life that induce feelings of criminality. Clearly, the writer has deliberately trapped the persona in predicaments of contemporary American life that automatically create an aura of grave moral jeopardy. In all three poems, the conflict between the worldly-mindedness of modern life and the inner life of the spirit is dramatized. Materialism, of a kind that blocks the persona in its struggle to connect with the world, is embodied in the indulgences of suburban middle-class home life of "The Firebombing"; in the business-like

[1] POEMS 1957-1967, by *James Dickey*. Wesleyan. $6.95.

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exterior of "The Fiend," his guise of normalcy and ordinariness; and in the catalogue of inferior occupational stereotypes, earmarked for Negroes by our society, in "Slave Quarters."

Wherever being is trapped in oneself or in others, the existential self must work, either through art or directly in life, to make life-saving connections—all those connections which create the free interchange of spirit between being and being. The word *connect* is the central one in Dickey's new poetry. His spirit must connect with the world, with "all worlds the growing encounters." In the best poems, all the connections are good. "I am a man who turns on," and when he turns on, all worlds he connects with turn on, since wherever he connects, he creates personal intimacy, injects intensity: "People are calling each other weeping with a hundred thousand/ Volts."

The one poem that perfectly reconciles the contradictions between worldliness and the inner life of the spirit is "Power and Light." The happiness of power and light heals all broken connections, "even the one/ With my wife." For the artist, the hardest connections to "turn good" may be the home connections, the ones thorny with daily ritual and sameness: "Thorns! Thorns! I am bursting/ Into the kitchen, into the sad way station/ Of my home. . . ." But if the connections are good, all worlds flow into each other, the good healing, cleansing the bad. There is woe in the worldly side of marriage, but it is good in its spiritual and sexual dimensions, in the "deep sway of underground."

"Power and Light" dramatizes the secret life of a pole-climber, a technician who works for the power company. Through the disguise of the persona, Dickey explores symbolically the ideal relationship between the artist and his audience, the poet and his readers:

> . . . I feel the wires running
> Like the life-force along the limed rafters and all connections
> With poles with the tarred naked belly-buckled black
> Trees I hook to my heels with the shrill phone calls leaping
> Long distance long distances through my hands all connections
>
> Even the one
> With my wife, turn good . . . Never think I don't know my profession
> Will lift me: why, all over hell the lights burn in your eyes,
> People are calling each other weeping with a hundred thousand
> Volts making deals pleading laughing like fate,
> Far off, invulnerable or with the right word pierced
>
> To the heart
> By wires I held, shooting off their ghostly mouths,
> In my gloves.

The pole-climber's spirit raises the spirits of the dead and damned from hell—marriage, too, being a kind of hell. The "ghostly mouths"

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of the spirits can all re-connect through the power lines—lines of the poem—and save themselves. The poet is blessed with such an access, a surplus, of lifesaving joy, he can afford to let it—the flood of power and light—overflow into the grave, into hell. He doesn't so much give life to the damned as open them up to hidden resources of life, newly accessible in themselves, by making connections. "Long distance," an eerie experience to begin with, becomes more haunting still when Dickey extends it to include connections between living and dead spirits.

Dickey proceeds in his vision to a point "far under the grass of my grave." No matter how deep he travels, even to hell, in the fuller mastery of his art he is confident "my profession/ Will lift me," and in lifting him, it will lift thousands of others from hell, his readers all over the world, symbolically making long distance phone calls all night, connecting, all the connections good. He feels the same power, whether in the basement of his home, "or flung up on towers walking/ Over mountains my charged hair standing on end." The spirit which pervades and dominates this poem, finally, can be identified as the spirit of laughter, a laughter closely akin to that of Malachi the stiltjack in Yeats's "High Talk," or the mad dancer of "A Drunken Man's Praise of Sobriety." Like these poems, "Power and Light" verges on self-parody in its hyperbolic imagery and rhetoric: "And I laugh/ Like my own fate watching over me night and day."

The comic spirit of "Power and Light" recovers the ground lost by the tragic spirit in the moral dilemmas of "The Firebombing" and "Slave Quarters." If modern man feels helpless before the massive political nightmare of his time, he finds he can retreat into "pure fires of the Self" for spiritual sustenance. This is the artist's escape and salvation. If he can't connect with the tragic people of this world's hell in daylight, by direct political action, he must reach them in the dark,/ deep sway of underground. The artist's night is the "night before Resurrection Day." He will resurrect the imagination, the spiritual life, of his Age. He performs these wonders, ironically, drunk in his suburban basement. A general in disguise. An unacknowledged legislator of the world. Regrettably, the philosophy, *if I turn on everyone turns on with me,* may offer small comfort in the political world.

If the worldly mystic spends a good portion of his day-to-day existence reconnecting with the world, at other times we find him searching for the pure moment in solitude, waiting to receive messages from the unseen beyond, and to answer the call. If he is receptive enough, he may pick up clues to learning his being from a wide range of sources: a rattlesnake, a blind old woman, a caged leopard. In all such poems, Dickey himself would seem to be the protagonist, the poem being a kind of reportage of an event from the author's life, in contrast with poems like "Power and Light" and "Falling," in

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which the persona and the author are completely separate, on the surface level.

"The Flash" is a weak poem, hardly more than a fragment of verse, but it gives the key to understanding the revelatory moments in the other poems in the group:

> Something far off buried deep and free
> In the country can always strike you dead
> Center of the brain. There is never anything
> It could be but you go dazzled . . .

You can't explain the flash logically, or fasten hold of it with your senses, but what is felt when "you go dazzled" is instantly recognizable, and can be distinguished, unerringly, from other events of the spirit. The flash is a spiritual fact that registers in the poet's intelligence with the same cold, tough certainty as snakebite. It is a guarantee of the inner life, but also insists on the inner life of the Other, of others "far off buried deep and free."

In "Snakebite," the encounter with the Other seems fated. "The one chosen" finds "there is no way not/ To be me." There is no way out, or through the experience, except saving oneself:

> . . . It is the role
> I have been cast in;
>
> It calls for blood.
>
> Act it out before the wind
> Blows: unspilt blood
>
> Will kill you. Open
> The new-footed tingling. Cut.
> Cut deep, as a brother would.
> Cut to save it. Me.

One must act out the roles that are thrust upon one by the Other, inescapably, as by the rattlesnake's poison. Art must invade those moments in life when failure to perform the correct self-saving gesture is to die. Art is a strange kind of intimacy, a blood-brotherhood, between the artist and himself. The poem must be an act of blood-letting. In saving the poem, as in saving one's life from snakebite, a man must be his own brother. No one else can help.

Midway in the action, the speaker shifts from the mortal necessity of lancing the wound to a moment of comic staging. At this point in Dickey's art, it seems appropriate and convincing for the comic spirit to interrupt the most serious human act of self-preservation. The laughter of self-dramatization parallels similar moments in "Encounter in the Cage Country," in which comic relief enhances the seriousness of the exchange between man and leopard:

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. . . at one brilliant move

I made as though drawing a gun from my hip-
bone, the bite-sized children broke
Up changing their concept of laughter,

But none of this changed his eyes, or changed
My green glasses. Alert, attentive,
He waited for what I could give him;

My moves my throat my wildest love,
The eyes behind my eyes.

In "False Youth II," the blind grandmother's message, like the words of an oracle, is delivered with absolute certitude: "You must laugh a lot/ Or be in the sun." Her advice strikes a reader as being a deeply personal and literal truth in the author's life at the time he wrote the poem, and this hunch is borne out by the relevance her words have to many of the best poems of the new volume. A comic spirit pervades poems like "Power and Light," "Encounter in the Cage Country" and "Sun" that one had not met or foreseen in Dickey's earlier work.

Dickey presents an experience from life—in "False Youth II"—which taught him to see deeply into the shifting sands of his own personality, as he slid, imperceptibly, from youth into middle age. Youth is a "lifetime search" for the human role, or roles, which, when acted out, will serve as a spiritual passport of entry into middle age. The necessary role may take the form of a physical gesture that perfectly corresponds to deep moves of the spirit: "My face froze . . . in a smile/ That has never left me since my thirty-eighth year."

The old blind woman unknowingly assumes the role of a fortune teller. She has developed a superhumanly receptive sense of touch. Her life is contracted intensely into her hands, her fingertips having grown fantastically sensitive and alive. As she runs her fingers over his eyes and forehead, the poetic images envision a scientific and quasi-scientific composite of data linking electromagnetism, finger-printing, astronomy, genetics, and fortune-telling:

. . . I closed my eyes as she put her fingertips lightly
On them and saw, behind sight something in me fire
Swirl in a great shape like a fingerprint like none other
In the history of the earth looping holding its wild lines
Of human force. Her forefinger then her keen nail
Went all the way along the deep middle line of my brow
Not guessing but knowing quivering deepening
Whatever I showed by it.

The wisdom of the old woman has a primeval quality about it. Her acutely sharpened instincts and sense of touch precede the scientific

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age and surpass recorded modern science in a revelation of human personality that draws on the learning of many sciences, but goes beyond each in its ability to *connect* them all: which is not to say this literally happens in life. It happens, rather, in the images of the poem's vision.

She leads him to discover he has come to a crossroads in his life and art. He must learn his life, as his art, and each stage of existence—in both worlds—concludes with a search for the blueprint to the next stage. The blueprint cannot simply be willed into existence. It is contained as a deeply true, hidden, map of possibility within his developing self. If there are alternative paths latent and waiting to be journeyed in the self at any particular spiritual crossroads (as in Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken"), there is one best route available at each crucial juncture. It is discoverable, and once discovered, it has an unmistakable ring of truth: "Not guessing but knowing quivering deepening." Though the answer waits inside him to be released, he cannot find his way to it by himself. He arrives in himself through a deep conjunction with another being, in faith, "some kind of song may have passed/ Between our closed mouths as I headed into the ice." There must be communion with the Other. Connection.

If one of the major new themes in Dickey's fifth volume is comic dramatization of his own personality, another is sexual realism. In both, he parallels the later Yeats. If we compare the vision in "The Fiend" with that in "Falling" and "The Sheep Child," we can get an idea of how far Dickey's art has travelled between the first major poem dealing with the theme of sexual realism and the last. In "The Fiend," the free-flowing form and the split line are fully exploited. This technique is well-suited to sustained psychological realism. Also, the fiend is a thoroughly convincing persona. The encounter between him and life-experience, though voyeuristic and "abnormal," is presented as final, incisive, fulfilling.

But somehow, the center of the poem's vision is too far from tragedy and believable danger: the poem lacks risk, the emotional pitch of a cosmos of love/beauty stretching to contain and transform a brutal agony of being. The sexual transcendence the persona unknowingly achieves is almost too evident, pre-given. Equipoise is not felt to be the outcome of a fierce yoking together of oppositely charged beings, as in the act of coitus between the farm boy and the mother ewe of "The Sheep Child":

> *. . . It was something like love*
> *From another world that seized her*
> *From behind, and she gave, not lifting her head*
> *Out of dew, without ever looking, her best*
> *Self to that great need.*

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The stench of evil in "The Fiend" is smothered under the catalogues of domestic inanities. There is no trace of the searing terror of "The Sheep Child," the terror of our settled scheme of things being ripped apart. It is too easy to dismiss the fiend as a genial saint—spiritually, if not bodily, harmless. "The Sheep Child" and "Falling" threaten us with glimpses into a world of becoming that is grimly near to us, a mere hand's-reach away from those extensions of being into the beyond that we all easily attain in moments of emotional intensity. And yet, that farther reach somehow eludes us, staying just out of our ken. The secret of uncompromised being is just a spiritual stone's throw away, but we are cut off. These poems soar into that further beyond with a sense of effortlessness and inevitability.

"The Fiend" was a breakthrough into the hinterland of sexual transcendence, but what begins as a reader's sympathetic identification ends as a comfortably removed appreciation of the poem's novelties. "The Sheep Child" and "Falling" trap the reader in a haunting, if inexpressible, certainty that a much larger, grander, demonic world—compounded of Heaven and Hell—lies just the other side of the limits of his known, calculable existence. And it waits, like the dead, for him to step inside:

I woke, dying,

In the summer sun of the hillside, with my eyes
Far more than human. I saw for a blazing moment
The great grassy world from both sides,
Man and beast in the round of their need,
And the hill wind stirred in my wool,
My hoof and my hand clasped each other,
I ate my one meal
Of milk, and died
Staring . . .

The reader must be willing to drown, fly, burn with a flame that sets all dreams on fire, and be the fire.

From "The Fiend" to "Falling," Dickey has been trying to find a medium that would enable him to *use* the maximum of his creative intelligence in poetry. To this end, he has chosen in "Falling" exactly the right subject and form. Both are moving toward a rhythm of experience that can sweep away all obstacles to realizing the fullest human potential: *"One cannot just fall just tumble screaming all that time one must use/ It."* When a woman's life-space has suddenly contracted into a few seconds, the necessity to conquer mental waste, to salvage every hidden, but discoverable shred of mental possibility, becomes absolute.

The opening sections of the poem stress the extent to which the girl's will, intention, participates in her experience. Her body and

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mind are both forced initially into reactions of powerful self-protective resistance, a mere reflex response to shock. But her will and creative imagination take on a larger and larger quotient of control. The female style of control is mixed with passivity, but the dynamic passivity of girding the body, sensually, as she "waits for something great to take/ Control of her." The beauty of healthy fulfilled physical life is Dickey's momentary stay against the chaos of the poem's life-crushing void. Within a moment of perfectly fulfilled physical being, her spirit lives an eternity.

The girl is strangely mated to air. The first half of her long erotic air-embrace is a turning inward. She is learning how to be, to be "in her/ Self." She masters "one after another of all the positions for love/ Making," and each position corresponds to a new tone or motion of being. The second half of her adventure is a going outward. She is no longer waiting to be taken hold of, but now *she* is the aggressor, who "must take up her body/ And fly." The shifts in her body-cycle—falling, floating, flying, falling—stand for consecutive stages in a being-cycle, rising, as she falls to her death, to a pinnacle of total self-realization. It is a movement from extreme self-love to extreme beyond-self love, a movement from being to becoming, from becoming to going beyond. Though her fall concludes with an auto-erotic orgasm, she connects, at the moment of climax, with the spirits of farm boys and girls below—there is a profound flow of being between them. This unobstructable river of feeling between the self and the world is the life-process to which Dickey ascribes ultimacy in his vision.

If ideas of rebirth and reincarnation are among the most compelling and pervasive in Dickey's art, the idea of resurrection by air—not water, earth, or fire—is the one that rises, finally, into apocalypse. A cursory glance at Dickey's biography might well support my hypothesis that, since the gravest spiritual losses to his manhood were incurred in air—via the incineration of women and children in the napalm bombings of Japan—he could be expected to seek compensatory gains to redeem himself, paradoxically, through that medium. In fact, he does achieve his most sustaining spiritual and poetic gains through the vision of air-genesis. It is my hope that in the years to come Dickey will return to the perplexing questions of war and race dealt with in "The Firebombing" and "Slave Quarters," and bring to his renewed treatment of those themes—surely the most troubling specters of our day—the larger generosity of spirit we find in the vision of "Falling" and "Power and Light." If there is a passion today that can counter balance all the hell in us, it is the ardor that fills these poems.

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CALVIN BEDIENT

The Opacity of Fiction[1]

ROBERT A. COLBY'S *Fiction with a Purpose* looks over seven "major" nineteenth-century English novels as "superior to, yet representative of, the fiction produced in their respective decades. . . ." One closes the book exhausted for the author—who would have thought the century had so much fiction in it? But also rather glad to get away. To study *Waverley* and *Mansfield Park, Pendennis* and *Oliver Twist, Jane Eyre, Middlemarch,* and *The Mill on the Floss* as "repositories of literary history" is to subject oneself to a kind of scholarly ordeal. One comes out drooping, dazed, and none the wiser. Though Colby seems to have a kind of rotgut tolerance for bad fiction, this is not the same as enthusiasm, and the book palls. Nor are there green shoots under the leaves he rakes up so diligently. It is not *useful* to be told which forgotten books these novels mirror or mock—or even that they do mirror and mock other books. For these mirrors were not true, they flattered; and as for their mockery, their satire on current follies of fiction, this is important now only in proportion as it is obvious, a felt fillip in the book. ". . . We can better take their measure," Colby says of the major novelists, "by seeing their novels against the literary landscape that once surrounded them, rather than as isolated peaks." But why look *down* from these heights? As modern readers we still find ourselves looking up, and that is all the measure we need.

Not that all of these peaks are high; *Pendennis* and *Waverley* are mere hills. Both the "major" and the "minor" of Colby's subtitle are overblown. But the great defect of *Fiction with a Purpose* is its failure to engage its main title; that title is the eye of a needle, and Colby does not get through. Do these seven novels have but one purpose? Are they the better for intending to change, to purge, to ennoble? Do they transcend or subvert their didacticism? To questions like these the book gives back no answer. How comfortable Colby is with the idea of didacticism. Whistling, he crosses a mined field.

And yet there is less to fear in didactic purpose than is often supposed. Good intentions never ruined a work of art; *Potemkin* survives its propaganda, and if survival is much more difficult for fiction (because it lacks the material immediacy of film), still it is not the presence of propaganda, but the absence of virtual life, that makes most nineteenth-century novels diaphanous shells. These transparent books were

[1] FICTION WITH A PURPOSE: MAJOR AND MINOR NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS, by *Robert A. Colby*. Indiana University $9.50. THOMAS HARDY, by *Irving Howe*. Macmillan. $4.95. RUDYARD KIPLING: REALIST AND FABULIST, by *Bonamy Dobrée*. Oxford University. $5.75. JOSEPH CONRAD: A PSYCHOANALYTIC BIOGRAPHY, by *Bernard C. Meyer, M. D.* Princeton University. $8.50.

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never more than illustrated ideology. The opacity, the mystery, the complexity of real experience were never in them. There was never anything for good intentions to ruin. But with the exception of *Waverley*, the "major" novels are all shot with blood. Didacticism—and this is what Colby fails to note—is unrelated to their vivacity. Their strength, their lasting beauty, lie in their obscurity and color, in the opal of their author's personality, in the elusive sapphire star of the world invented in their pages. "Aesthetic teaching" for these major writers is unconscious pretext and camouflage. Emotion, imaginative impulse, is the engine that drives their books. And of this dominating feeling, this humming furnace, Colby is usually unaware.

It is not that Colby makes claims for didacticism, it is simply that he is taken in by it. Thus he says of *Villette* that its "detailed recording of mental anguish is meant as a spiritual catharsis," as a "sermon against despair"; and he is content to let it go at that. But *Villette* is saturated with the psychological and its protest, not with morality and its resignation, and that protest is precisely its power. Its catharsis is not spiritual but emotional. What the book actually communicates are certain magnetic and amoral impulses: the joyous late blossoming of the bare bough; the personal, complacent triumph of the oppressed; and the poignant suffering of loss—so masterfully *not* described—that secretly atones for both the triumph and the blossoming. *Villette* is finally a book about the harshness of fate, and is in this sense profoundly unchristian. Plain Lucy Snowe's heart is wonderfully wild.

Then of *Middlemarch* Colby says that it "has been misread as a study in disillusionment," but disappointment drips from every eave in the book, and is its atmosphere. *The Mill on the Floss,* as Colby says, "enabled George Eliot to be 'born a little sister' again"—and what ignited and finally exploded the book was this high-tension longing, and not, as Colby seems to believe, "a new insight into the relations of body and mind and the dynamics of heredity" that George Eliot may or may not have learned from Lewes. Of course in other ways too she here gives rein to the fleshy and turgid heart, and it nearly runs away with her. She stops it only by killing it.

Colby is stronger on Thackeray and Jane Austen, for he is alert to their complexity and ambivalence. What opacity there is in Jane Austen is typified by the shame Fanny feels for her home when Henry Crawford descends upon it. We feel the shame, we feel Fanny's sense that it is a weakness, and her inability to cast it out. Caught between snobbery and loyalty, sensibility and morality, the scene quivers like a drop of water about to fall from a faucet. How marvellously on to the self Jane Austen was. ". . . Pictures of perfection," she once said, ". . . make me sick & wicked. . . ." And there is the quick, the darkening element in her work. As for Dickens, his imagination *was* a darkness, and its true light is not morality but a feverish gleam.

I have said that *Waverley* lacks the opacity of these other books.

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And yet *Waverley* is not dead. It lives, quietly, with a mild minimum of vitality, like an old oak tree. What gives it vivacity is Scott's good will, that benign and sunny nature for which he is so often praised. Scott is playing Providence in *Waverley*, and precisely this is his artistic motive. Bestowing happiness on his creatures, preserving and advertising an older Scotland, how lordly, how free, how generous he is. The last little lesson on Waverley's growth from "gay dreams" to "internal confidence and mental dignity" comes, not at the end, but some sixty pages earlier. Scott does not have it at heart. He is larger than morality; he is God.

At best, and almost in spite of itself, the nineteenth-century English novel is opalesque—only the gleaming obsidian pages of *Wuthering Heights* resist the invasion, the illumination, of ideas. But in Hardy ideas take on a new function. They no longer oppose, penetrate, or dispel the natural mystery of experience, but, on the contrary, make a cult of it; they are ideas of fate. Clouds of misery, what can be obtained from them? Neither hope, nor consolation, nor pluck; perhaps only the tenacity of a shrub on a heath.

Hardy was the first English novelist to feel overcome by the darkness of agnosticism. For him, the world is a bristling, brutal Thing, and as for personality, Christianity no longer interprets or contains it: in Sue Bridehead and Eustacia Vye, it bounces wild, like a stone down a hill. It is true that the lights went out earlier on George Eliot, but unlike that great, overstrained sibyl, Hardy succumbed to self-pity. He *would* not take his eyes from the monster "Nature" was; he *would* press against its briars. Yet Hardy thus gained one of the greatest gifts a novelist can have, the insight and beauty of a fraternal compassion. Wooden-tongued, morose as he is, he moves us by his determination to see his Tess and Jude through everything, raising his voice against the castrating enormities of the universe.

Irving Howe's *Thomas Hardy* ripples with observation. Compact, sophisticated, balanced, it is alive all through. Howe takes his Hardy straight, undiluted by critical theory, pet ideas, or fear of emotion. Though his book is thorough, it leaves Hardy unimpaled. And how flexible and responsive it is. As for Howe's judgments, their tact is unimpeachable. Compared, he notes, to such writers as George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad, Hardy "seems simple, crude, rough; but also full of an instinctive wisdom, an enormous weight of experience and reflection." That is exactly right. And of Hardy's poetry Howe astutely says: "Slowly his flaws as a writer become marks of distinction: like character without physical advantage revealing itself as a mode of beauty."

The sensuous weight, the dramatic value, the human richness of the novels—these Howe measures sensitively. His relation to the globular world of the books is loving, defensive against the flatness of ideas: "What matters in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* . . . is the figure of Tess

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herself. Tess as she is, a woman made real through the craft of art, and not Tess as she represents an idea." If Howe speaks of Hardy's "metaphysics," he means it as a synonym for prosaic "philosophy." Hardy's universe is, precisely, physical, and to Hardy that was half the tragedy: "If but some vengeful god would call to me. . . ." It was the succeeding generation that turned metaphysical; thought, in Hardy, wears boots encumbered by "the mulch of the barton," and lives oppressed under a clouded sky. These books turn heavily, like ponderous planets. And exactly this earthiness accounts for much of their power, their lumpish integrity.

But if Howe praises Hardy's opaque and leafy detail, it is partly in recoil from Hardy's philosophy. Thinking of it as outdated, as requiring patience, as existing in scattered chunks, he circles around it in distaste, as if it were a corpse on a Wessex plain. And yet Howe does not quite see this philosophy for what it is. ". . . Plot in Hardy's novels," he writes, "is supposed to signify, through its startling convolutions, a view of the human condition. But to succeed in such an aim, Hardy would have had to establish . . . an aura of the inevitable. . . ." Though a common criticism, this stems from a misapprehension. Howe fails to note a crucial difference between *The Dynasts* and the novels; in the matter of fatality, these works are at opposite poles. The philosophy of *The Dynasts* is determinism, the philosophy of the great novels is chance. Too soon, too late, the wrong person at the wrong time—could any refrain be more banal? Yet transmuted by the flame of Hardy's humanity, it becomes pure gold, a magnificent instrument of art. Now it is true that Jude quotes the chorus of the *Agamemnon:* "Things . . . will be brought to their destined issue." But in Hardy predestination is an illusion of retrospect—it is the idea that washes up after the storm has passed. No one could take a great interest in it. The real life of the book is already over. And that life, that movement, that vehemence is, as Angel Clare saw, the lash of "harrowing contingencies," the hailing "unexpectedness of things." If premonitions attack the confidence of Eustacia and Sue, these are the *angst* of guilt, the fear of life, not the dread of destined issues. In Hardy things ricochet uncertainly to their end. Chance strikes like a snake from the grass. And this philosophy of circumstance is the master switch of the fiction. It sounds the alarm of emotion, names the undefeatable antagonist, and is the furious principle of the plot.

The real "inevitability" in Hardy is his artistic intention. Enamored of disaster, he drives all on before him like cattle marked for slaughter. He contradicts his own creation: where all is frightening circumstance, he wields the secure pen of fate.

Hardy's work is one long wave rushing toward the modern; in *Jude the Obscure,* it begins to break. Howe is keen on Hardy's scouting of modernist sensibility, and he resists the temptation to make Hardy too much our own. If he tugs at all, it is on Hardy's technique. "In most of

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his important novels," he says, "Hardy was a writer struggling toward expressionist and symbolist fiction. . . ." But Hardy's struggle was just the opposite: to make repeated mishap realistic (as, indeed, Hardy supposed it was). The "convolutions" of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are not symbolic, only inept; skill came later with *Tess* and *Jude*. Though Howe speaks now and then of Hardy's "symbolism," he is never specific, and for good reason: there is no symbolism in Hardy. The glow in Hardy's pages is something more delicate than symbolism—in Howe's own term, "metaphoric intensification." And this is the faintest nudge, it should not be exaggerated. Alex d'Urberville is not "a kind of devil," neither is the weather at Flintcomb-Ash "apocalyptic"—these are feverish readings. Nor is it true that *Jude* "cannot be fully apprehended if read as a conventional realistic work." The queer lightness of this novel is not a "distended expressiveness," but the effect of the abstraction of the earth in its pages, the almost theatrical dominance of dialogue. If we speak of distended expressiveness in *Jude,* what terms will we have left for *Heart of Darkness,* or *Women in Love*?

Bonamy Dobrée's *Rudyard Kipling* is marred by a gritty note of apologetics. Name any objection to Kipling's work; Dobrée has refuted it. The book is written from *within* Kipling, and from within Kipling criticism. It is a room without windows—but at least Dobrée is happy there. Kipling has been, he writes, "my constant reading ever since boyhood." And certainly he knows Kipling well. Under such headings as "Work and Devotion," "Laughter," "Healing," he mentions, for instance, over 150 of Kipling's stories. But "mentions" is precisely the word: the book is a kind of roll-call, and Dobrée lacks the quick touch that tells. Plucked for their themes, their realistic or fabulous components, the stories themselves never appear whole. Nor is Dobrée any less perfunctory with the poems. Here Kipling is not explored, he is busily invaded.

The Kipling that still dazzles, still makes us start with admiration, is the Kipling of those short stories which, giving out the silent, powerful cry of experience, lack, astonishingly lack, the counter-cry of ideas. "Mary Postgate," "Dayspring Mishandled," "On Greenhow Hill," "The Man Who Would Be King"—these brilliant stories are among the most opaque in English. What nerve, what restraint, it must have taken to write them. Kipling is even more enigmatic than Hardy; and yet there is much in common in their worlds. Both writers look outward, noting almost impassively, and in Kipling's case without comment, the intricate evil of fate, the absence of Providence. How wonderful is the ending of "On Greenhow Hill," with its raven flapping out of the pine woods, the distant deserter rolling down a red rock and lying still, and Otheris, who has just shot him, "staring across the valley, with the smile of the artist who looks on the completed work." Slowly the statement expands in the mind to embrace the entire story; the great smiling marksman in Kipling is fate.

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Kipling and Hardy are alike obsessed with man's pain—the sheer gratuity of it. In "Mary Postgate," the English spinster listens ecstatically to the death rattles of a German pilot. "She closed her eyes and drank it in. . . . 'Go on,' she murmured, half aloud, 'That isn't the end.'" It is horrifying, this protracted, diseased orgasm of a virgin released at last, in this terrible way, from the cramp of unfulfillment. After a luxurious hot bath, she lies "all relaxed on the . . . sofa," looking "quite handsome." This is artistry; this is a rather unsettling genius for opacity.

"The unintelligent brutality of . . . existence": Conrad, too, is staggered by it. But where Hardy looks out, accusingly, and Kipling simply looks on, Conrad is insidiously drawn within. The terror, the violence, the perfidy of the sea—these are mere ghosts and echoes of the self. There in the interior lies the real brutality, the truly "unintelligent," the darkness of the world.

The inward look is vertiginous. Conrad's style has a kind of sickened desperation, the effect of a holding on. If, while looking, Conrad was fascinated—partly, perhaps, in hopes of discovering the utterness of truth ("A thing the origin of which you cannot trace," he said, ". . . is an illusion")—what he saw, or sensed, was nonetheless an "abomination"; and what we hear in his work is the cry of a horrified, gentlemanly consciousness at the treachery, the surprising familiarity of the sordid agent, the murderous sharer, within. The result of this self-division was a style that is at once an exploration and a cloud of ink.

Devious, overelaborate, cautious, Conrad's attack upon appearances is equivocal. For what will come next? Perhaps the glimpse that disintegrates. Though Conrad said that his aim was to make us *see*, his real aim was to keep up the veil—for this endangered man found his defence, and his art, in "the magic suggestiveness of music." At most Conrad allows us, he allows himself, to *sense* the enormity of it all. As Bernard C. Meyer shows in his superb psychoanalytic biography, Conrad's work was a cover for certain personal satisfactions: fetishism, scopophilia, castration anxiety, Oedipal wishes, oral sadism, the longing to be penetrated by a phallic woman, narcissism, masochism, exhibitionism, a death wish—here at last, if the word still holds, is the abomination which lures and appals under that somber and magnificent prose.

Where Kipling withholds comment with the poise and awesome daring of an acrobat, Conrad is almost entirely comment, though the comment lacks edge. Meyer, as it were, joins and completes Conrad's task—and his instrument is all pitiless blade. Though we descend a good way with Conrad, Meyer takes us one farther deck down—a decisive, final descent, for here the infantile sources of art declare themselves, and romance has been abandoned, an older child's dream. Above all, the area is cramped. Meyer's biography develops an appall-

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ing paradox: though Conrad was never able to go home again, neither was he able to leave home. More exactly, the early months of his life formed a paradise, the early years a prison. He never left the prison, he never regained the paradise.

Biology proposed, circumstance—early exile with his parents, their ugly, successive deaths—disposed, and Conrad's life was set in a cycle of assertion and collapse, caught as in a squirrel cage. Almost his life ceased to be real. For what followed his first years was hallucination. The women in his life, the women in his fiction, were his mother; the men, his father, or Conrad himself as a little boy. The betrayals, the rescues, the "cannibalism," the illnesses, the wish to die—all converged on the lost mother. But the complexity of Meyer's analysis can hardly be suggested in this summary fashion. And the reductions, the "findings" of psychoanalysis—they inevitably sound absurd in summary. How predictable they generally are; how they ring with the message, "There! It's just as we thought!" And it is true that what Jacques Rivière called the "imperialism" of psychoanalysis is unashamedly displayed in Meyer's book. When Meyer sees the little birds in the fiction as winged phalli, one wants to call in the Audubon Society.

But the findings of expert psychoanalysis—and that is what this biography is—are as hard to refute as they are to feel at ease with. Psychoanalysis has, of course, replaced Christianity as a way of explaining human nature; it is the new transparency. Does Meyer's reading deprive the work of its resonance? Only in reflection, and then only in part. Back in the fiction, we are adrift in the mystery again—the spell is there, exuded by the prose. And psychoanalysis itself, properly taken—as Meyer's honest and liberal use of words like *perhaps* and *conjecture* shows—is only a transparency nestled in darkness, a way of acknowledging the enigma.

To Our Readers:

Two new books by editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, they will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed here for the interest of our readers:

ANTHONY HECHT: *The Hard Hours.* Atheneum. $5.00 cloth / $2.45 paper.

JOHN SIMON: *Private Screenings.* Macmillan. $5.95.

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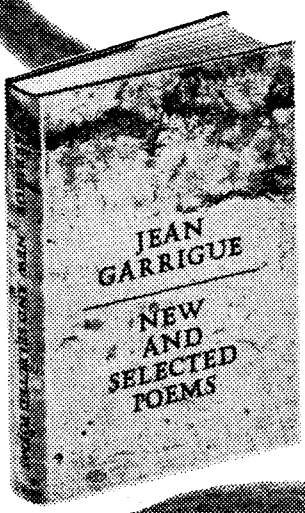

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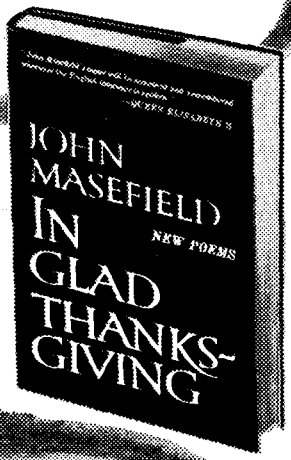

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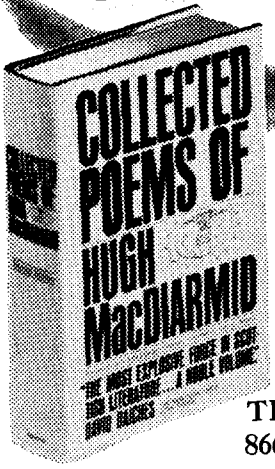

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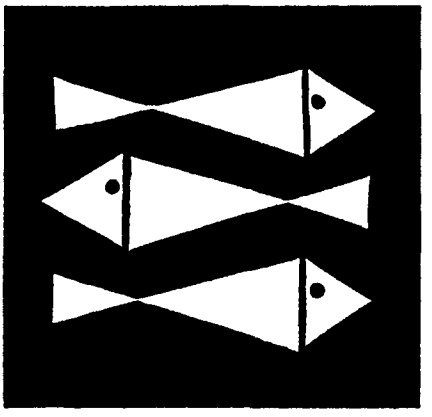

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